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META'S FAITH.

VOL. III.

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E. J. Stephenson

META'S FAITH.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,”

“JEANIE’S QUIET LIFE,”

&c., &c.

“In our days, a man is the son of his own deeds.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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META'S FAITH.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER the awarding of the Burton prize, things came back to what might be termed, in grand phraseology, their state of normal quietness. The students settled down to work again. Rodney Charnock, who had only gone to his rooms at College for a few days, until the examination was over, returned to Carriden-Regis, and lounged his time away as pleasantly as he could, until his uncle was ready for him; spending a considerable portion of it at Percy Cottage, greatly to Mrs. Waldemar's satisfaction.

Indeed she could not feel sufficiently thankful for the turn which affairs had taken with regard to Meta's prospects. Everything now seemed to point to a speedy settlement for her step-daughter. Mr. Charnock's attentions was so unmistakable. He was so evidently only waiting for a little encouragement on Meta's part to declare himself. A word, even a look would do it, if only the girl would not be so foolishly shy and undemonstrative.

For her own part, however, when Mr. Charnock mentioned the subject to her, which he would no doubt do before long, she should give her entire sanction to his wishes; and she intended, moreover, to insist upon Meta's making up her mind to the engagement. She should not allow any nonsense or trifling on the young lady's part.

Such an opportunity was far too valuable to be thrown away, and that Meta was quite disposed to throw it away, was only too certain from the indifference with which she received attentions which any other girl would have welcomed with becoming consciousness, and repaid with an occasional smile of approval and encouragement. Mrs. Waldemar made up her mind that she must have a private interview with Meta before long, and set before her plainly, and beyond the possibility of misunderstanding, the course of conduct which she must follow with respect to Mr. Charnock.

The day after the awarding of the prize, Stephen Garton went to Millsmany to show his mother his medal and certificates. Then he took lodgings for her in a quiet, respectable part of the town, where she could have such comforts as her humble tastes re-

quired, and placed in Dr. Ellesley's hands a sum of money sufficient for her maintenance during the months that he intended to spend in Germany. After this was done, he packed up his scanty belongings, and, without saying good-bye to anyone, save his College companions and Dr. Ellesley—to whom, when Rodney Charnock could no longer be injured by it, he made an explanation of that affair in the common hall four months ago, and so freed himself from the imputation of ingratitude which had been resting like a cloud upon him ever since—he set off to London, to make arrangements for going abroad; and within five days of the College dinner, he was on his way to the German university, there to forget his troubles, if he could, in real hard work.

He had watched Meta very narrowly as

she sat in the hall, with Rodney Charnock by her side, on the day of his success. She had no smile of greeting for him in that tumult of applause which followed the reading of his name by Dr. Ellesley. She just sat there, quiet and unmoved, looking if anything a little graver than before. He even thought there was a touch of disappointment on her face. But that was likely enough. Of course she wanted Rodney Charnock to win the prize—Rodney Charnock who was paying her such marked attentions, smiling upon her, toying with her bouquet, putting forth all his little flattering wiles, just as Stephen Garton had heard him talk dozens of times about putting them forth, to the young ladies whose affections he boasted so loudly of having gained.

And that Meta knew what he meant by them, was evident from the embarrassment

of her manner. How could any girl help liking him when he bent over her with such tender words and smiles? What right had he, Stephen Garton, poor, meanly bred, kept down by his low surroundings, conscious of a certain ingrained awkwardness which no contact with cultivated society could entirely rub off now, to hope for success when Rodney Charnock, polite, affable, polished to the very last degree of fashionable smoothness, entered the lists with him? When brains only were wanted, the victory had been very easy; when tact and skill and soft flatteries were required, a superficial fool had conquered him.

Well, let it be so. Sometimes Stephen felt heroic about it. He tried hard to make himself believe that it was no very great trouble to lose the love which could be taken away so lightly. Only three weeks ago, last time

he went to Percy Cottage, Meta had been bright and kind as ever. She had let her hand rest in his. She had listened with a blush upon her cheek as he read the sweet legends of those Rhine maidens, glancing towards her now and then for answering look of his as the poet's words trembled on his lips and gave his own love language; a language she could not fail to understand, else why should she turn her face away so shyly, and why should the colour deepen on her cheek? Only three weeks ago, and now it was all forgotten! What easy work forgetting must be, for some people!

But perhaps it was better so. Let her take her fashionable fool and make the best she could of him. Let her forget that she had ever looked into an honest man's face with those tender blue eyes of hers, and suffered him to read in them a seeming

story of love and trust; or quickly turned them away for what his own had said. If she preferred fashionable fools to honest men, why let her live joyfully with the fool of her choice all the days of her life: she was not, she never could have been the woman for him. He would set off to Germany and forget her. He would go and make for himself a reputation there—he knew he could make a reputation somewhere—and then, when he was such a man as his country need not be ashamed to honour, he would come back again to this village of Carriden-Regis, whose frigid aristocracy had once scorned and thrust him out of their midst for being the son of a piquis washerwoman. And he would show them what a washerwoman's son could do. He would show them that the true greatness of a man can struggle up, ay, and will struggle up too, through

the bars and barriers of circumstance, and take its own place and win its own honour, spite of all that fashionable folly can do to keep it down.

And then the people who thrust him forth would reach out their white hands to bid him back again, and the monied upstarts who had despised his lowly birth would welcome him into their select circles with many a fair word and smile. But no; it was their choice to thrust him forth, it should be his choice to return. Perhaps a few of the whips and stings they had heaped upon him might be paid back in kind when he, and not they, held the reins of power. It would be his turn to scorn them then, as they scorned him now; to pass them by with uplifted head and proud, unconscious glance, as Mrs. Waldemar had passed him by only a day or two ago, whilst Meta,

the woman he loved, the woman whose love for him he once thought, though unconfessed, was so tender and so true, turned her face away from him to a newer, more smoothly-spoken suitor.

Such thoughts as these, and a great many others equally foolish and—under the circumstances—excusable, passed through Stephen Garton's mind as he packed up his new portmanteau in the London hotel before starting for the Continent. Packed it, not with seedy coats and worn-out neckties, and frayed wristbands, but with a respectable outfit such as any student might have been contented to possess, and then went and took his passage in the next steamer for Rotterdam, intending to stay there and see a little of the country before entering his name in the University books.

Still there was a secret bitterness under

all the pride and high-flown independence. Though he tried very hard to make himself believe that he had nothing to do but triumph over his despisers by letting them see how superior he could be to them, there was a sorrow untouched by his pride, and a sadness which no high-flown independence could ever cover or heal; the sadness and the sorrow of the strong, tender soul within him, which had ventured so much and lost it, lost it wrongfully, lost it perhaps needlessly.

For, though he felt sure that Mrs. Walde-mar had cast him off so suddenly in consequence of some misrepresentations which had been made to her by Rodney Charnock, he was not sure that Meta had quite forgotten him. He thought sometimes, that if she had indeed quite forgotten him, turned him out of her heart, and given the place to Rodney Charnock, she would not have look-

ed so quiet and almost grave when he was watching her on the prize day. She did not seem to be listening to Charnock's words as she had listened to his own in those not far past summer days, when some happy chance left them alone together in the Percy Cottage parlour, or when he used to saunter with her in sunshiny afternoons through the glades of Carriden-Regis wood. And there was an unquiet look upon her face when she and Mrs. Waldemar and Charnock passed him in the beech-tree avenue, the look of one who had not quite learned to forget. If she did care a little for him, still. If there would be some faint, regretful longing in her heart when she learned, as she would very soon learn, perhaps from Dr. Ellesley, or Rodney Charnock himself, that he had gone quite away, that she would never be troubled with the sight of him, for good or evil, any more.

Stephen almost hoped there would be. And then he was vexed with himself for hoping it. Because such longing would give her pain, now that all was quite over. The sooner she learned to forget him, the sooner she learned to be content with Rodney Charnock, the better. All memory of him, except as such memory served to set forth, as on some dark contrasting background, the surpassing elegance and devotion of her new admirer, would be wisely put away. It could do no good, only harm, now. And though she had wronged him, and though she had been untrue to him, and though she had made all his life a poor, worthless, shrivelled thing, good for nothing but patient endurance and striving after what, when reached, could never content him now, still she was his Hermione, the only woman he had ever loved, the

only woman he ever would love. Her memory, and no other, he had shut up within his heart. She had come to him the fair ideal of all his early hopes and dreamings; she had clasped hands with him for a little while, and then parted from him, to go along some more flowery path than he could make for her. But having lost her, he could seek none other to go with him. The rest of the way, whatever it might be, must be journeyed alone.

So Stephen Garton thought as he said good-bye to England, and set forth to meet his fortunes or misfortunes, as fate might bring them to him, in that German university.

CHAPTER II.

MISS HACKLEBURY knitted diligently away at the stockings; so diligently, that three days after that grand display in the College hall, she had got them finished, the heels darned—because, as she said, Stephen might not be able to meet with a suitable person to mend them for him in Germany, and stockings lasted so much longer when the heels were properly attended to—and each pair marked with his initials, and duly numbered, that they might not, as she said, come to odds in the wash. Dorothy Ann was so admirably practical and housewifely in all her ways. If Stephen could but

have known the good-will which was knitted into those six pairs of Welsh yarn stockings; the tender memories, and loving, longing thoughts which had sprung up, like little blades of autumn-sown wheat, on the hard, rough soil of Miss Hacklebury's heart, as she seamed and shaped, and narrowed and increased, and cast off, and put on, and brought the twelve successive toes to a suitably rounded termination. But he never did know.

At last they were all finished, and laid out in pairs.

"I must get Buttons to take these stockings down to the College for me to-night," she said, as Mrs. Waldemar and she sat together in the Percy Cottage dining-room the third day after the prize-giving. "I wish I could have got speech of him myself, so as to have given him a hint about putting

them on, and to turn down the heel properly, and be sure to have the seam stitch perfectly straight up the middle of the back, for the first two or three times of wearing. It's everything in the fit of a pair of hand-knit stockings, as our poor mother used to say, how they're put on for the first time or two. I almost thought he would have been coming down to see us before this, but I can explain it to Buttons, and she can give the message. She's a trusty girl when you once *do* get a thing into her head."

"Whatever are you thinking about?" said Mrs. Waldemar, querulously. She was lounging in her easy-chair before a bright fire—the night had fallen rather damp—and protecting her complexion from its heat with an elegant Indian hand-screen, one of the late Mr. Waldemar's presents. "Whatever are you thinking about, to send Buttons down

to the College at this time of night, and so wild as the girl is after followers? I'm sure its perfectly scandalous the way she stands at the side passage door, talking to any man that happens to come. If it was not that she puts up with your peculiar temper so well, I should have spoken about a change months ago. What can you be thinking about to propose such a thing as her going to the College to-night?"

"Thinking about!" said Miss Hacklebury, rather roused by this allusion to her temper, which, if not the smoothest in the world, was at any rate equal to sister Waldemar's. "Thinking about?—why of Mr. Garton's getting his six pairs of stockings, to be sure. What else should I be thinking about, I wonder? I told you weeks and weeks ago, before ever you went out for your summer visit, that it was on my mind to knit him a

set of socks against he went to Germany, if he got that prize; and now they're finished, and the Queen herself needn't wish a better lot, and I intend Buttons to go with them this very night, or he'll be gone."

"Buttons need not do anything of the sort," replied Mrs. Waldemar, as though giving her sister a piece of information which, if she had had the smallest amount of common sense, she might have found out for herself. "Mr. Garton went off to London this morning, and sails for Germany to-morrow, or the day after. I saw Mrs. Ellesley this afternoon, and she told me so."

"Mr. Garton gone to Germany! And never to have come and said good-bye to us! Well, to be sure!"

And Miss Hacklebury could not think of anything else to say just then. But she

told Meta, long long afterwards, that if she ever *did* feel a sensation about her heart as if she was going to faint, it was when sister Waldemar told her that Mr. Garton had gone away to Germany, without even coming to say good-bye to them.

“And the kindness that’s been showed to him,” she said, by-and-by, when she had a little recovered from the surprise which Mrs. Waldemar’s statement had produced, “as I am sure if he had been a son, it could not have been greater on my part; for I felt a wonderful drawing to the young man from the very first, and behaved accordingly, as soon as ever you asked him to come to the house. And didn’t you tell him at the prize-giving, sister Waldemar, that we should be pleased of a call from him, and that I’d a set of Welsh yarn stockings for him of my own knitting, that I thought would be ac-

ceptable to him for winter wear abroad? I made sure you would see him and tell him something of the sort at the prize-giving."

Mrs. Waldemar had recourse to her vinaigrette.

"Dorothy Ann, how *can* you talk in such an improper manner? As if, when I had Mr. Charnock with me, I could enter into conversation with a young man about worsted stockings. But it's just like you. You seem to have no ideas of feminine propriety. I'm sure I'm positively ashamed of you when anyone calls; you make such exceedingly coarse remarks. And as for asking young Garton to call and say good-bye to us, if his own sense of politeness did not prompt him to do it, it was not my duty to remind him. He had not even the courtesy to come and speak to us, and

never took the slightest notice of Meta. He is a young man who has no idea of gratitude or obligation, as you might have found out from the very first, if you had not taken such an unaccountably foolish fancy to him."

Mrs. Waldemar had not yet told her sister about that note to Stephen Garton, neither had she any intention of doing so. She knew that Dorothy Ann had a kindly feeling towards the young man, and when she did take to anybody, she did it with a pertinacious straightforwardness which was sometimes troublesome. Moreover, she had a lurking notion that Meta's affections swayed towards the lowly-born divinity student, and that this secretly cherished preference was at the bottom of much of her indifference towards Mr. Charnock, who would be so much more desirable a match for her. If,

therefore, she could leave the impression on Meta's mind, as well as on sister Dorothy Ann's, that Garton had acted dishonourably and ungratefully towards the family, in leaving Carriden-Regis so abruptly without even so much as calling to acknowledge the kindness which had been shown to him at Percy Cottage, this might tend to loosen his hold upon Meta's heart, and perhaps also convince her that he had only been playing with her throughout those summer months, when he was in the habit of coming so frequently to the house.

At any rate she must, if possible, keep up this impression until after her plans for Meta and Mr. Charnock had been successful. If, after that, the truth did slip out, it was of no great consequence. It could not make any difference, then.

She knew, too, that Miss Hacklebury did

not care a whit about a man's antecedents. So long as he was honest and honourable, and upright, his father might have been a chimney sweep or a coster-monger for any difference it made in her treatment of him. And therefore if she gave low breeding as the reason of her abrupt dismissal of Stephen Garton from the hospitalities of Percy Cottage, she would only draw down upon herself Miss Hacklebury's wrath, and perhaps in the end produce a clearing up between the two young people, which, under present circumstances, was the very last thing she should wish to see produced.

On the other hand, if she took Miss Hacklebury into her confidence and mentioned that little plan about Mr. Charnock, the result would be scarcely less satisfactory; for if there was one thing more than another which sister Dorothy Ann detested

with all her heart, and against which she set her face with the most determined opposition, it was any sort of scheming or management in affairs of that nature. She always said that if Providence intended girls to be married, it would find husbands for them without any contrivance on the part of other people, and that men and women had very much better do for themselves separately, than be stitched together for the mere convenience of housekeeping and bread-getting. And therefore Mrs. Waldemar was quite sure that if sister Dorothy Ann had so much as a suspicion that Mr. Charnock was intended for Meta, she would be sure to go and put her foot into the whole affair, and make a complete failure of it.

It was much better, then, that she should be left in the dark. And so the solicitor's widow made no further explanation of mat-

ters, but allowed her sister to suppose, as indeed seemed abundantly proved by Mr. Garton's recent behaviour, that he had merely availed himself of their hospitality so long as it was a convenience to him, and when it had served his turn, he dropped it. Also, that he had been trifling with Meta's affections, amusing himself by paying unmeaning attentions to her, which, as Mrs. Waldemar knew well enough, would set Dorothy Ann against him ten times more than any slight offered to themselves as his friends and entertainers.

Miss Hacklebury made no reply to her sister's ill-natured speech about the stockings, neither did she resent the imputation which was thrust upon her of being the first to encourage Stephen's intimacy at the house. She knew it was no use contradicting sister Waldemar when she got into one

of her captious moods. And besides, she was so "put about," as she termed it, by such unlooked-for behaviour on the part of a young man towards whom she had cherished so much warm regard, that she had no thought left for self-defence or recrimination. She gathered up the stockings, marched upstairs with them to her own room, put them away, not without some bitterness of spirit, and then sat down to think about what had happened.

Stephen Garton had gone away to Germany, perhaps for a year, certainly for six months, without coming to bid them good-bye—without even saying a word to Meta when he saw her on the occasion of the prize-giving. It would not have been so very far for him to come to Percy Cottage, even though on account of the little Goverlies being away at the sea-side, he had

no teaching to bring him into the village. Still Miss Hacklebury could make allowances for him on the ground of his being so busy preparing for the examination. Of course it was very important that he should give himself entirely to his work just then; and as the time for the prize-giving drew on, many things might crowd upon him in the way of study which he had not thought of before. But when once that was over, when the medal was awarded, and the dinner and the excitement and the congratulations were over, then, if he had had any sort of honour and manhood and straightforwardness about him, Stephen Garton ought to have come to Percy Cottage; not only out of friendliness, though that should have been enough to bring him, but for the something far more than mere friendliness, which, if she was not more mistaken than

ever she had been in her life before, he had allowed to spring up between himself and Meta.

There had been no misunderstanding between them, either, to account for his going away in that abrupt manner. Miss Hacklebury well remembered the last evening he came to Percy Cottage, three weeks ago, just before sister Waldemar returned from her summer visit; that pleasant, balmy August evening when they all three sat together in the drawing-room, Meta with some netting work in the bay-window—Miss Hacklebury thought she had never seen her look prettier than she looked that evening, there was such a colour in her cheeks and such a light in her eyes, certainly Meta had the sweetest, loveliest eyes that ever anyone looked into—Stephen quite on the far side of the room, reading to them out of a couple of books

which he had brought with him from the College. One was a book of German stories, legends, he called them, which she could not exactly understand; they were too romantic and high-flown for her tastes, and the knights and the maidens made more fuss over each other than she thought there was any need for. The other was a book of ballads, much more simple and practical and intelligible. One of them she remembered very distinctly, for it was a song that Meta sung sometimes, called "Jeanie and Jamie," and there was something in it about going to Germany.

"Be my gude man yoursel', Jamie,
And tak' me owre to Germanie
Wi' you at hame to dwell, laddie."

Rather an out-of-the-way request, Miss Hacklebury thought, for a lady to make to a gentleman; but then people did sometimes

do out-of-the-way things in ballads—things that nobody would think of doing in real life, and this was most likely one of them; but she noticed that, as Mr. Garton read the verse about going to Germany, he glanced across to Meta, and Meta glanced at him for a moment, and then appeared so wonderfully absorbed with her netting. Whereupon Miss Hacklebury had bethought herself of some linen that wanted sorting out from the great chest at the top of the stairs, and accordingly she went there and then to sort it out. Because, as she said to herself, they were but young people, and young people had their little thoughts and feelings, which they preferred to talk over by themselves. She rather fancied Stephen and Meta had been talking over something of the kind, for when she came back again after half an hour's work at the linen-chest,

he had found his way to the bay window somehow or other, and Meta looked rosier and prettier than ever. Of course she took no notice of it, only she could not help thinking that they had been making good use of the time whilst she was away, spending it even more pleasantly than in reading German legends or Scotch ballads.

That was only three weeks ago, the last time he had ever come to the house, and now he had set off to Germany, with no word of leave-taking or anything of the kind. Was that the way, then, that men behaved, and divinity students, too, of all others, who were in training to be burning and shining lights to their day and generation? And was it to this end, the shadowing of Meta's life, the wounding of her innocent little heart, that she, Miss Hacklebury, had made tea for Stephen Garton so

many times from the best end of the tea-caddy, and instructed Joanna to be generous about the crumpets, and taken the young man into her heart almost like a son, and given herself so many a back-ache and arm-ache in knitting those six pairs of Welsh yarn socks, and marking and numbering them, and running every single separate stitch of the twelve heels of them, that Mr. Garton might have something to remind him when he went away, of the people who had been kind to him before he became great and famous, as he would no doubt become, after winning the Burton scholarship? Had it just come to that, then, that he was to set off without a word of farewell to them, or a single look of honest, trustful, honourably-confessed love to the girl whose heart he had been winning through all these bright summer months?

Miss Hacklebury stuffed the six pairs of stockings into her drawers, and thanked Providence that for the last thirty years she had had nothing to do with the men.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CHARNOCK continued his attentions at Percy Cottage, to the increasing satisfaction of Mrs. Waldemar. Indeed, there was scarcely an evening now when he did not come in after dark on some pretext or other. It was very evident what he meant. If Meta had had the smallest amount of common sense, her step-mamma said, the whole affair might have been triumphantly settled weeks ago.

But Meta had not the smallest amount of common sense. She became more and more ridiculous, as Mrs. Waldemar called it, in her deportment; never appearing in the

slightest degree conscious of the attentions which were so liberally bestowed, or offering the slightest encouragement to the explanation which a single look of happy consciousness would have produced. Really such nonsense was getting quite unbearable. A stop must be put to it, in some way or other.

And so anxious as Mr. Charnock was to practise with her too, and the evenings of delightful social intercourse they might have had in that way, if only Meta had not spoiled everything by her foolish indifference. For she actually refused one night to sing a duet with him which she knew as well as possible. Indeed, Mrs. Waldemar had heard her singing it over to herself scores of times since May, "Jeanie and Jamie." The most agreeable duet that was ever composed for a lady and gentleman to sing

together, for the dialogue was so sweetly suggestive, and with proper action and expression might be made so very effective. Mrs. Waldemar did not know how it could be sung many times by people who had the slightest drawing to each other, without something coming of it. And the girl had actually refused to sing it with Mr. Charnock, or even play the accompaniment for him whilst he sang it alone. Such folly was unheard of.

But Mrs. Waldemar could not allow it to pass unnoticed. She had had Meta up into her dressing-room that very evening, after Mr. Charnock had taken his departure, and given her a serious reprimand, and told her that this sort of thing must not be suffered to go on any longer. She was throwing away such a chance as might not be placed within her reach again for years. She must

make up her mind to accept the opportunity of an advantageous settlement which was now presented to her, or else some communication must be held with the trustees of the late Mr. Waldemar, and his widow relieved from all further responsibility with regard to a girl who had proved herself so incapable of appreciating the endeavours put forth for her welfare. The stipulation expressed in the late Mr. Waldemar's will, concerning a suitable maintenance for his daughter, was only binding so long as the daughter conducted herself in a suitable manner, and when that ceased to be the case she must take the consequences of her own imprudence.

After which reprimand, delivered in Mrs. Waldemar's most effective manner, accompanied with looks and tones of portentous severity, poor Meta went weeping to bed, and sobbed herself to sleep.

She often did that now, for her life was fast becoming a weariness to her. Meta was one of those simple, humble souls who can trust much and wait patiently, if only a single word of love is given for the trust to hold by, and the patience to stay itself upon. Had Stephen Garton but once said to her, "I love you, Meta," she could have let him go from her to the very ends of the earth, asking no more than that, wanting nothing more to make her happiness complete. No jealous cloud would afterwards have crossed the blue heaven of her trust; no doubts of her own constancy and of his, would have vexed whatever years of separation might follow that one word, given and received in perfect, unquestioning faith. Leaving her just that one word to think about, Stephen Garton might have gone where he liked, and staid as long as he

liked, no anxious doubtful thought of hers would ever have followed him.

But he had left her without even a farewell. He had passed her by, last time they met, and never so much as looked upon her. As the slow days wearied by, after the brilliant gathering in the College hall, she had waited so patiently, thinking that surely he would come again, that he could not go away and leave her so, when she had done nothing that she knew of, to vex or grieve him. Until one morning, calling with her mamma upon Mrs. Ellesley, the Governor's mother told them that Mr. Garton had started that day for London, intending, as soon as his outfit was prepared, to take a steamer for Rotterdam, and make a tour through Germany on his way to the university.

Whereupon her mamma had appeared to

be excessively annoyed; had said what a very strange thing it was that he had never called to say good-bye to them at Percy Cottage, after receiving so much kindness from her sister and herself, and having been treated almost like one of the family. She could only account for it at all, she said, on the ground of his being so exceedingly shy and awkward, and not liking to receive the congratulations which would be offered to him by his friends, if he formally took his leave of them before leaving the neighbourhood.

Mrs. Ellesley had said that was most likely the case, though she scarcely thought it justified Mr. Garton in such a piece of neglect, especially when Mrs. Waldemar had been so kind to him. And then the subject had dropped.

Meta came home feeling as if all the bright-

ness of her life had suddenly died out. She was not proud enough to rise up and cast the whole thing from her; to trample down a love which had been vainly given, though not unsought by many a tender look and tone. And so she did what only such patient, loving souls as hers can do—she kept it quietly to herself, let it slowly eat out the joy and peace and content from her life. Day by day after Stephen's departure she grew sadder and quieter; a little of its girlish music faded from her voice, a little of its girlish lightness from her step. And then as that root of bitterness within struck its fibres farther and farther down, the colour began to flicker in her cheeks, and their rounded outlines to shrink, and the glow of life and hope that had once shone out of her eyes grew very dim, as though there was nothing within now to keep it burning.

But she would soon come round again, as Mrs. Waldemar said when Miss Hacklebury first ventured to remark on Meta's altered looks. It was the season that was trying her, nothing more than that. The first autumn that people spent in a place was sure to be an awkward time for them, especially in a place like Carriden-Regis, where there were so many trees about. It was almost impossible for anyone to keep thoroughly well when the leaves began to fall and the October damps to strike out of the woods. For her own part, though she had lived in the place so many years, the autumn season always affected her fearfully. It unstrung her nerves so, and caused her to become so unusually sensitive that the slightest thing made her give way, go into those terrible hysterics or something of that sort. And Meta was feeling the change too, al-

though, not being possessed of a nervous system so exceptionally delicate, it affected her in a different way.

She must have some strengthening mixture, Mrs. Waldemar said. Had not Dorothy Ann some herb preparation or other, which was good for weak constitutions? She always knew exactly what to give to the poor people in her district if their livers got out of order, or they became subject to attacks of ague, and it was a pity if she could not bring a little of her skill to bear upon the members of her own family. There was a herb tonic which their mother used always to keep by her at the fall of the year, good for low spirits or bad digestion, or anything of that sort. Dorothy Ann might make some of that, and see if it would do any good. Because Meta was not really ill enough to make the attendance

of a medical man necessary. When you got a medical man into a house in a case of that sort, you never knew when you got him out again; for the most tedious of all illnesses were those where the patient had nothing the matter with her, nothing at least that could be taken hold of. And Meta was just in that way, listless and dejected, and taking no interest in anything, and seeming as if everything was a trouble to her. Mrs. Waldemar was not quite sure sometimes whether temper had not a little to do with the change which had come over her.

So Aunt Hacklebury set to work upon the herb tonic. After shaking up together what appeared to Meta to be a collection of little bits of stick and chip and stalk, and dry leaves, she put the whole into an earthen pipkin, and covered it with water, and let it simmer for a whole day, after

which it was skimmed and drawn off into bottles, and doled out to Meta in wine-glasses at suitable intervals.

“Because,” as Aunt Hacklebury said, briskly and cheerfully, as though nothing whatever were the matter, for she thought Meta would only get worse by being made to think she was out of health—“Because it’s the change of the year, you know, and people always want a little something to brace them up at such times. Now that you’ve come to live at Carriden-Regis, where there’s so much wood and damp, and such heaps of leaves, you must always take something of this kind in the autumn season, to brace you up, or else you’ll be having cramp and agues, and nervous fevers, and I don’t know what. It’s a terrible place for such things is Carriden-Regis. I never was in a worse in my life.”

And then, to show that she was not giving advice which was only good for other people, Dorothy Ann took a deep gulp of the herb tonic, and declared that she felt it strike through her system there and then, and brace her up until she scarcely thought she was the same woman. It was better, she said, than all the mineral poisons that were ever cooked up in chemists' shops, was that herb tonic which their dear mother gave her the recipe for, twenty years ago, and told her to be always sure to keep a stock by her at the change of the year.

But Aunt Hacklebury knew all the time, though she never told anyone so, that no herb tonic would bring back the smile to Meta's lips, nor the colour to her cheeks, nor the happy lightness to her step, which was so listless and feeble, now. There was only one tonic in all the world which could

bring back to Meta what she had lost since Stephen Garton went away, and that tonic, alas! Aunt Hacklebury could not give.

And so she watched the poor girl from day to day, with silent, almost motherly kindness. It was not in her nature to show much sympathy; perhaps now, the less she showed the better, for a trouble which, if known to be a trouble at all, would only become more bitter; but what she could do by daily, unobtrusive household kindness, by a loving word now and then, a little added tenderness in look and manner, extra care spent in preparation of dainties for the failing appetite, she did with such hearty goodwill, that Meta became drawn towards her plain, practical common-sense aunt with almost the affection of a daughter.

Still, though the young girl kept growing paler and thinner, Mrs. Waldemar insisted

that there was nothing to make a fuss over. All of Meta's ill-health that was not attributed to autumnal damp, had been produced, she was quite convinced, by fancy and ill-temper. People who are given to the indulgence of fancies themselves, are generally ready to credit others with the same weakness to a much greater extent. Meta was vexed, no doubt, that she had been spoken to so plainly about her behaviour towards Mr. Charnock, and this was the way her vexation manifested itself. Quiet girls, who never went into passions, or had fits of hysterics, or made any outward demonstration of their feelings, often would brood over any little vexation of this sort, until it took quite an effect upon them, just as it was taking an effect upon Meta now. It was sinful, she thought, positively sinful, to give way to such unamiable tempers, and put people to

so much trouble in the making of herb tonics and the cooking of delicacies to tempt a capricious appetite, and Meta ought to be told so, and bidden to stir herself up to overcome them.

But one day, after Meta had been “dwin-
ing” for three or four weeks, Dr. Ellesley happened to call at Percy Cottage, and Mrs. Waldemar—her step-daughter being in the room—launched into quite a different vein of remarks. In the presence of a friend to whom it was important that she should appear clinging, and affectionate, and impulsive, anything like a want of sympathy with Meta’s ailments must be carefully avoided. Accordingly, after a few introductory remarks, she entered upon the subject with that charming appearance of almost girlish simplicity which Mrs. Waldemar considered one of her strong points.

“And now, Doctor, *can* you tell me what I must do with this naughty girl of mine? You can't *think* how naughty she is. Now are you not, Meta, my pet?”

Meta, thus appealed to in such an entirely different tone from that in which Mrs. Waldemar generally animadverted in private upon her naughtinesses, could only lift an innocent, inquiring look to her mamma's face, and say,

“How, mamma?”

“Ah! you see,” and Mrs. Waldemar shook her head with a pretty mixture of playfulness and solicitude—“you see how it is, Doctor? She never *will* let me say that anything is the matter with her. And yet, do you know, she won't eat, and she won't talk, and she won't practise her merry songs—will you now, Meta, my darling? And I can't get her to laugh one bit. And what do you

think I sometimes say about it? Why, do you *know*, I actually say that I am quite sure that some one has come and run away with her heart. Now, don't you think, Doctor, that some one *must* have come and run away with her heart? I do believe I shall have her leaving me some day."

The Doctor glanced quickly at Meta, who was blushing uncomfortably enough, feeling quite sure that Dr. Ellesley must have known all about her and Stephen Garton. She was too weak and spiritless, however, to fire up and defend herself, if, indeed, she could have done that at any time, against her graceful, wily, impenetrable step-mamma. To encounter Mrs. Waldemar, except with her own weapons of cunning and contrivance, was as useless as to fire shots into a down pillow.

Dr. Ellesley had never asked himself the question whether Meta cared for him. He

only knew that all he could give to any living woman was given to her, and that all of love and cherishing which could bless his future life must come from her. Perhaps now for the first time, as he noticed that quick conscious blush, the hope might flash across his mind that it was for him. He had seen a blush like that once on Agnes Elliot's cheek, when some one was talking playfully to her, as Mrs. Waldemar was talking playfully to Meta now; and he had learned afterwards that the thought of him had brought it there. And a joy as pure as that which, twenty years ago, Agnes Elliot's downcast, conscious look had stirred within him, began to tremble again in that heart whose tender freshness half a lifetime had not spoiled.

But he noticed afterwards what perhaps, had not Mrs. Waldemar spoken of it, would

have escaped his attention. He saw that Meta did look ill and worn, that something seemed to have been taken out of her face—what it was he could not tell—and that a new expression, anxious, restless, had come into it. As though she wanted some one to care for her, and be kind to her, and give her that sweet motherly tenderness which Mrs. Waldemar, hard, shallow, polished, never could give. How could it be given? That was the question.

“But, you know, I sometimes think,” continued Meta’s step-mamma, “that the season has something to do with it. The autumn at Carriden-Regis is a remarkably trying time for people who are not *very* robust, like myself and Meta. The village stands so low, and when the leaves begin to fall I always think such an unhealthy moisture strikes down from the woods. Poor dear Mr. Wal-

demar always used to take me away in the autumn for a few weeks, because he knew the damp affected me so, my constitution is so very susceptible, and he used to see in a moment when anything ailed me. Poor dear man! he was so affectionately alive to anything like suffering on my part, and would never allow me to stay a *day* in the cottage after I had felt the autumn air strike through me."

And Mrs. Waldemar looked pensive. Her countenance always assumed an air of gentle melancholy when she had occasion to revert to the exceeding attentiveness of the late poor dear Mr. Waldemar.

The Doctor listened gravely, but did not seem anxious to continue the subject. As soon as Mrs. Waldemar's observations on her bygone matrimonial felicity had come to a close, he made a few halting, disjointed re-

marks about his presence being required at the College, and then took his course thitherwards, turning over in his own mind, as he did so, a thought which had struck him during the call.

CHAPTER IV.

WHICH thought speedily worked itself into practice. For Dr. Ellesley was not an undecided man, though the extreme hesitation and embarrassment of his manner in mixed society might leave that impression on the minds of some indiscriminating people. When he had once determined that a thing ought to be done, he did it, and did it too, with a readiness and promptitude which astonished those of his acquaintance who were accustomed to think of him as a mild, dreamy, absorbed, unpractical man.

The very next morning, having first talked the subject over with his mother, whose

love for Meta made her, as he knew it would, almost as anxious as himself to enter into any plan for her comfort, he and Mrs. Ellesley drove down in the little basket-carriage to Percy Cottage and took Meta back with them to the College for a short visit. Change of air and society, Mrs. Ellesley said, would do her more good than medicine. And as the College stood on rising ground, at some little distance from the woods, and also caught the fresh breezes from Millsmany moors, Meta would be out of reach there of any ill effects which the autumnal damps, striking through a low-built and perhaps not very well drained old village like Carriden-Regis, might exert upon a delicate person.

Sister Hacklebury was wonderfully pleased with the suggestion. It was just the very thing, she said, for Meta. She had been

telling sister Waldemar for some weeks past that she was sure the girl needed change. The village air did not suit her, accustomed as she had been from her childhood to the dry atmosphere of the south; and she was very glad Mrs. Ellesley had thought of it, for it would do Meta a world of good—quite set her up in fact, for the winter.

“Now, sister Waldemar, won’t it quite set her up for the winter; brace her up even more than the herb tonics, though of course she must keep on taking them just the same.”

Sister Waldemar did not look at it in that light. She was not a woman who ever did look at a subject in any other light than that in which her own interests might be affected by it. She did not very much like the thought of another than herself going and staying with Dr. and Mrs.

Ellesley for an indefinite length of time. And that other one Meta, too. She had heard of men like the Doctor, grave, studious, literary men, suddenly taking a fancy to girls young enough to be their daughters, and when such men did take such a fancy, it was astonishing how they clung to it. Not, of course, that there was the remotest possibility of anything of that kind happening in the present instance. If she was not very much mistaken, the Doctor's affections were already engaged. At least, his matrimonial plans were fixed. At his time of life men had got out of the way of thinking much about their affections; they looked out more for suitability and comfort and companionableness, and some one to sustain their position; all of which requisites the Doctor would find in the lady on whom she had reason to believe

he had already fixed his choice. Still, it was not the thing she should have chosen for Meta to go to the College for a lengthened visit under any circumstances.

But especially under present circumstances. Because her visit there would put a stop to Mr. Charnock's attentions, which were fast verging towards definiteness. It was decidedly inexpedient that Meta should be removed from them at the present juncture. She had accepted them with little enough thankfulness all along, though Mrs. Walde-mar had thought of late, since the receiving of that sharp reprimand, she had been a little more sensible and decorous in her behaviour. Perhaps, if she ever did care at all for Mr. Garton, she was beginning to feel that he had treated her with inexcusable neglect; and was turning any preference which she might once have cherished for

him in the direction of Mr. Charnock, who would be so much more eligible a partner for her. Now, of course, if she went away, the intimacy would be suspended, and then when she came back to Percy Cottage, the whole affair would have to be set on foot again, as it were, from the very beginning. And, as likely as not, Mr. Charnock, not having committed himself as yet by any formal declaration of his intentions, might, in the interval of her absence, meet with some one who impressed him more favourably, and so the whole affair would come to a useless and unsatisfactory termination.

On the whole, Mrs. Waldemar thought Meta had better not go to the College, and therefore she did not at once chime in with sister Dorothy Ann's delighted exclamation.

“Just the very thing, sister Waldemar. It will quite set her up for the winter.”

But then another consideration presented itself. If Meta went to the College, she should herself have an opportunity of going there as frequently as she thought desirable, to inquire after her health. That was not an opportunity to be overlooked. Because, so long as her daughter was there, and in delicate health, too, it was the most natural thing in the world that frequent visits should be paid to her, and also that she, Mrs. Waldemar, should receive frequent reports of her progress. Indeed, when she came to think about it, she felt convinced that this was the very object Dr. Ellesley had had in view when he proposed the arrangement. He wished to increase his opportunities of acquaintance, and this was an admirable opportunity of doing so without

exposing either of them to ill-natured gossip and remark. Poor dear man! he was so very shy, and unless he had such an attraction as drew him to Percy Cottage, social intercourse was quite a trial to him. And perhaps a whisper of some sort had reached him, through the medium of Mrs. Danesborough, who was always so very ready to make mischief amongst her neighbours, and that was the reason why he had not been so frequently into the village of late. But an arrangement like this would completely obviate the difficulty. It must of necessity produce a continual interchange of visits, and she had not the slightest doubt upon her own mind now that it had been proposed for the purpose of leading to something decisive. Meta had better be allowed to go.

These considerations passed through Mrs.

Waldemar's mind in much less time than their relation has occupied, whilst she was entertaining Mrs. Ellesley in the Percy Cottage dining-room, and expatiating upon the great kindness shown by that lady to her darling Meta. After duly balancing both sides of the question, she decided that her step-daughter's chances, with respect to Mr. Charnock, ought not to be allowed to interfere with her own, as regarded the Governor, and accordingly she accepted the invitation with her customary overflow of affectionate gratitude.

“So kind of you, dear Mrs. Ellesley, so *very* kind. I really feel that I shall *never* be able to express my thanks. And just the very *thing* I had been wishing for so long, because you know I am *quite* sure it is nothing but the damp season which is affecting my darling's health, and a week or

two with you would be *such* a charming thing for her, particularly as I know she loves you so very much. I am sure it is quite *wonderful* the fancy she has taken to you. Was I not saying to you only a few days ago, Dorothy Ann dear, that Meta had taken quite a fancy to dear Mrs. Ellesley?"

Dorothy Ann, who had no notion of giving in to her sister's got-up enthusiasms, said that she could not recall any remark of the kind, but still she was quite sure it would do Meta a world of good to go to the College, and it was very kind of Mrs. Ellesley to have proposed it.

"Yes, indeed, *charmingly* kind," said Mrs. Waldemar; "but not for *very* long," and she looked appealingly into Mrs. Ellesley's face. "Not for *very* long, dear Mrs. Ellesley. You know I shall be so fearfully dull with-

out her. Oh! you don't *know* how dull I shall be! She is quite the light and sunshine of the house, is she not, Dorothy Ann, dear?"

Dorothy Ann assented to that proposition with a vigorous nod. She was counting the stitches on a piece of knitting-work, and held her spare needle between her teeth whilst performing that operation, so that a verbal reply was inconvenient.

"Yes, quite the light and sunshine of the house, and I shall be *so* lonely without her. But you will let me come *sometimes*, now *will* you not?" Mrs. Waldemar added, brightening up as if the thought had suddenly suggested itself to her. "You will let me come over and see her *sometimes*. I will try not to be troublesome to you, I am sure, but you know I *must* have a peep at my darling now and then."

“Oh! pray do,” said Mrs. Ellesley, warmly; “come whenever you like. I am quite sorry I never thought of mentioning it before, but it really did not strike me how much you would miss Meta at home. But do come, both of you, as often as you can; and, Fergus—”

Here Mrs. Ellesley turned to her son, who was standing in the bay-window, watching the pony.

“Fergus, you must drive down sometimes, when Mrs. Waldemar cannot come, and let her know how Meta is getting on. How thoughtless it was of me not to mention it, but I believe I was so pleased at the thought of having Meta with me, that I forgot about everything else.”

Mrs. Waldemar accepted the apology with a smile of pensive sweetness which seemed to say,

"Ah! I am accustomed to be neglected *now*. It was not always so."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Ellesley. Then whenever the state of my health permits, I shall walk over and see how my pet is progressing. And be sure you take care of yourself, Meta, darling, for I shall be so *very* anxious about you. I can't *tell* you how anxious I shall be about you, until I know that the change of air is suiting you."

And so, with many kisses and farewells, and a very hysteric demonstration from Mrs. Waldemar as the basket-carriage moved off, Meta set out upon her visit to the new College of Cariden-Regis.

"Just the very best thing that could have been thought of for her," Miss Hacklebury said, quietly wiping a tear out of the corner of her eye as the carriage got out of sight, and she sat down to the knitting again.

Somehow Meta had fastened herself very deeply into that rough, hardy heart, its very roughness perhaps making a firmer holding-place for the fibres of her gentler nature. "The very best thing that could have been thought of for her. I don't say that it will do everything in the way of making her strong again, but it's better than all the herb tonics she could take, though they're an excellent thing in their way.

For Aunt Hacklebury knew that Meta would often hear about Stephen Garton at the College; hear him spoken of kindly and lovingly, so differently to the way in which Mrs. Waldemar always spoke of him. And though things looked strangely against him now, and though, if he had been any other man than the man she took him for, and believed him to be from the very first, she would have said that he was a scamp

and a deceiver, still she had faith that all would come right in the end. Stephen Garton was not the man to wrong anybody, she was quite sure of that. Sister Waldemar had had something to do with it. The more she thought about it, the more she was convinced that sister Waldemar had had something to do with it. It lay very strongly upon her mind that somehow—though how, she could not for the life of her make out—Stephen had been unfairly dealt with in some way; and though things seemed very dark and unhopeful now, yet if Meta could but trust and wait patiently a little longer, all would be well.

CHAPTER V.

THEN came several weeks of happy days for Meta Waldemar. Happy at least so far as the meek, sad, uncomplaining little soul could know any more happiness whilst that cruel thought, the thought of Stephen's forgetfulness, was pressing it down so heavily.

At any rate they were days of rest from the burden, sometimes almost too weary to be endured, which was laid upon her at home. She was free from Rodney Charnock's polite flatteries. There was no longer the patter of his meaningless conversation to be listened to. There was no longer any need,

for fear of incurring her mamma's displeasure, to put on an air of cheerfulness, and to receive as though she was pleased with them, or at least not to repel with absolute indifference, attentions which, the more they were thrust upon her, became more irksome and unwelcome.

She was beginning to understand Mrs. Waldemar's character now, and to shrink from it with the instinctive repulsion of a simple, transparent nature. She had more than once caught a glimpse of the motives by which that graceful, elegant, artificial life was worked. Her sense of refinement, partly instinctive, partly cultured by long companionship with a thorough gentlewoman like her aunt, old Miss Warrener, had been first pained and then shocked by Mrs. Waldemar's scheming to get her, as she expressed it, advantageously settled in life. Scheming which

that lady did not even attempt to conceal, but which she broadly, unhesitatingly explained to her daughter, and in which she expected her to take her share, and do her own part towards bringing it to a triumphant issue.

And yet Meta had scarcely force enough to set herself against the wily influence, and refuse to give in to it. Her want of self-confidence and self-esteem did much more sometimes than, as in the case of her first introduction to Dr. Ellesley, make her distrustful of her own power to please. It made her distrustful of her own power to do right, or even to know what right was. So far as she did know it, her conscientiousness made her cling firmly to it. She would not have told a lie, or deliberately deceived anyone, or taken more than she felt she had a right to take, for all that Mrs. Waldemar

could set before her. But where the right way was not absolutely certain, where not conscience, but only an instinctive sense of fitness, pointed in one direction, and that which Mrs. Waldemar pressed upon her as filial duty and respect pointed in another, then poor Meta, not trusting herself sufficiently, and being always reverent towards those who were set in authority over her, hesitated, felt ill at ease, doubted which way she ought to take, and sometimes perhaps yielded, for the sake of so-called duty, what her own strong womanly sense of right would have impelled her to withhold. She could not trust unwaveringly in her own judgment, when such trust involved resistance against one towards whom her native lowliness of heart prompted obedience.

So, even if her love for Stephen Garton, so fast-rooted in her heart, and unreturned

as she slowly learned to think it was, had not embittered her life, this continual jarring of a lower, yet stronger, wiler, more subtle nature, upon her own, this perpetual hesitation and uncertainty between her own instinctive sense of right, and that overstrained sense of duty which Mrs. Waldemar had contrived to instil into her, would by-and-by have drawn away all the sweetness from it. For, not having independence enough to act for herself, where no absolutely infallible guide led the way, and having yet that lowly, loving heart, which could not bear to wound or to offend, she was never at rest. The very sweetness of her nature turned it into bitterness for her. She was never sure that the thing she did was the right thing to do. If she pleased Mrs. Waldemar, she did violence to her own womanliness. If she acted according to the dictates of that

womanliness, she brought upon herself the stripes and stings of the wily yet winning tyrant, whom to obey was her only peace.

It was the relief from this continually tightening bondage which made her visit to the College such a pleasure to her. And Mrs. Ellesley, truthful, refined, cultured, gave to her what Miss Hacklebury, equally truthful, but tougher, and not so cultured, could not give. Miss Hacklebury's blunt practicality, her unyielding straightforwardness, her absolute intractability under anything like scheming or management, the simplicity with which she foiled any attempt to blindfold or bamboozle her, and the unconscious innocence with which she used to frustrate the craft of her elegant sister, made her a most desirable ventilator to the otherwise pernicious, unhealthy moral atmosphere which Mrs. Waldemar generated around her. But Miss

Hacklebury's influence was something like that of the east wind which Buttons admitted with such malicious satisfaction through all available doors and windows; invigorating no doubt, and infinitely better than the musty, unwholesome closeness of an ill-ventilated house, but still rather trying at times, and often productive of anything but a benediction on the part of those who had to encounter it. Whereas Mrs. Ellesley's straightforwardness, tempered as it was with gentleness and grace, and coming from a heart rich in loving-kindness, was like the "sweet south, breathing over a bank of violets, stealing and giving odour."

Then those long quiet afternoons, when the November twilight began to fall so early; and, too idle to read or work, Meta used to lie on the sofa in the College library, listening to Mrs. Ellesley as she

talked in her peaceful, homely, meditative fashion, about the little matters of their daily life, matters which not seldom led the way to something about Stephen Garton. For she loved the young man because of the toils and hardships he had overpassed; and for her son's sake too, who had been so good to him, she had a pride in his success.

From Mrs. Ellesley, Meta first heard the story of his schoolboy days: about his trying for that prize, and being put back in consequence of a fault which he had never committed, and how he had taken his punishment so quietly, never murmuring over it, never saying a word of its injustice, until the boy who had done the wrong was, as he thought, out of harm's reach. And even then he had not set himself straight, but had waited patiently until the whole thing came out by accident. And

how, after that, Dr. Ellesley had taken such an interest in him, and put him into the College and kept him there, until now the best gift it could give had been won by him, and he had a fair path before him to honour and competence.

“And I’m sure he deserves it too,” said the old lady, “for if ever there was any one who denied himself for learning’s sake, it was Stephen Garton. Fergus always used to say that Stephen Garton could not help but succeed, he had such energy and determination. If he once set his mind upon anything, he was sure to accomplish it. And such a diligent student, too. He was a whole man to one thing at a time, my son said, and that thing was nearly always the gaining of knowledge. There wasn’t another student in the College like him.”

“Yes,” said Meta quietly, “I should think

he was very clever. The Goverlies always said he was very clever, and brought the children on very well."

"Ah! the Goverlies said so, did they? I never could understand his leaving them so suddenly, because I know he intended to have gone on with his teaching for some time longer, even if he did succeed in getting the prize. You know he was not obliged to go to Germany at once. He might have kept on studying here if he had chosen, and gone to the German university any time, or not at all. And I did fancy, from something he once said—for you know Fergus used often to have him in here in an evening, and he used to talk to us about what he meant to do, just as if he had been a son of our own—I did fancy from something he once said, that he did not mean to go abroad just at present. And when the Goverlies

were here on the prize day, Fergus observed that they did not take the slightest notice of him, which was very strange. Of course it was not my son's business to make any inquiries about it, and Mr. Garton never mentioned the subject to us; but still we were surprised, and we should neither of us like to think that he could have done anything to account for such a change."

"Though still," Mrs. Ellesley continued, "he was always very headstrong. Clever, decided men like him, who have worked their way up so far, generally are headstrong. I suppose it is the very thing which makes them get on, and I daresay he could not bear anything like slight or contempt. One of the students here, young Charnock—I think your mamma knows him—used to vex him sometimes by alluding to his poor relations and his mean bringing up; a very wrong thing, as I said,

because if a man can raise himself above his original position, and sustain himself honourably when he has risen, it proves that there must be something in him. I have often heard Fergus say that nothing raised Stephen Garton in his estimation more than the way in which he used to bear young Charnock's ill-natured remarks. But still, you know, my dear, if anyone went too far with him he could not put up with it, and it has struck us that something of the kind may have been said to him at the Goverlies. They are not people that I know anything at all about, and so I cannot tell; but I do know this, that Stephen would resent that sort of thing very much, if it went too far. You know those very quiet people who can bear so much, *do* fire up wonderfully when once they are roused. Mr. Garton always reminded me very much, in the strong quiet-

ness of his disposition, of one of my poor brothers who died a long time ago, when he had been a year or two at college. For the Church, you know, my dear. All my family belonged to the Church."

And then Mrs. Ellesley would drift away into the recollections of her early days, and the circumstances which had led her to discontinue her attendance upon the ministrations of the parish clergyman; Meta listening all the time in a sort of half-waking dream, until Mrs. Ellesley came back to the original subject, Stephen Garton, and expatiated, as she never seemed tired of expatiating, on his talent and goodness and perseverance, and the many difficulties he had struggled with so manfully, and the fine field of usefulness which lay before him now, if only he went on as he had begun.

Meta enjoyed hearing the old lady talk

in this way. Hers was not that selfish love which turns to malice when slighted or unrequited. It was still the dearest delight she could have to hear Stephen praised, though that praise only reminded her how much she had lost. It was the sharpest sadness of her home life to hear him spoken of as Mrs. Waldemar always used to speak of him; though had she loved him less simply, that continual blaming and accusing of him might have convinced her that she had not lost so very much after all. Stephen Garton might forget her if he liked, most likely he had done so by this time, but that could never make her forget him. Her love had in it that divine element of forbearance and forgiveness which, unremembered, remembers still; and uncared for, repays that very ingratitude with a richer overflow of charity. If she was too

weak, too gentle to trample out an affection which had sprung up not unbidden in her heart, she also lacked that intensity of bitterness which stirs in loftier natures when wronged, and moves them never to forget or forgive. Like the fair Elaine, she could die if need were, for the love of him who perchance had never spent a thought upon her; but she could never speak a word against him, or own that he had done other than nobly.

Then in the evenings, Dr. Ellesley used to leave his study and come to keep them company in the library, which was Mrs. Ellesley's favourite autumn room. Sometimes he would read to them, but oftener he sat in the great easy-chair with his hands folded together, just as he had sat there that first night when Meta came to tea at the College; and waking from a short sleep,

she often found his eyes turned upon her with just the same musing, absorbed expression which she remembered so well before.

One night when he had gone out of the room, she said to Mrs. Ellesley,

"I think I must remind Dr. Ellesley of someone he once knew. Aunt Warrener used to look at me in that way very often, and then say how much I was like mamma, my own mamma, you know. She was very fond of mamma."

"Yes, dear," Mrs. Ellesley said, "you *do* remind Fergus of someone. You are very like his wife, who died twenty years ago."

"Am I?" said Meta, simply. "Do you think he likes to be reminded of her? Was she very good?"

"Yes, she was a very gentle, true-hearted woman. And she was so dear to him, that

although she died so long ago, he has never loved anyone else, and I don't think he ever will. I am quite sure Fergus will never marry again now, for he could never find any one to love like his first wife, Agnes."

A year ago, Meta would have thought that very strange. Now she could understand it a little better. She could imagine how one complete and satisfying love should be enough for a man's life. She thought it would be enough for hers. She did not think that, having cared for Stephen Garton as she had cared for him, she could ever care very much for anyone else. At least she thought if she ever did love anyone again, it would be because he reminded her of Stephen Garton. She could imagine herself loving Stephen over again in someone else, but only so; not for the other someone's own sake.

After that she never wondered why Dr.

Ellesley used to look at her so long and earnestly; nor why sometimes, as she lay upon the sofa, for she was too weary and spiritless to do much else than lie on the sofa all through those dull November days, he used to come and sit by her, and smooth her hair, and wind the long curls round his fingers, or hold her hand in his with a grave, fatherly sort of tenderness. He certainly was very kind and good. She wondered now, how she ever could have thought him stiff, how she ever could have been afraid of him, and fancied that it was a trouble to him to help anyone. And sometimes, too, he would quite put away his grave, professional look, and be almost merry as they all chatted together in the library; such quaint little touches of humour stealing out from him now and then, as unexpected and as pleasant as the stray wild flowers on those

great sad-coloured Millsmany moors. And Mrs. Ellesley would say to him,

“Why, Fergus, you are growing young again.”

To which the Governor replied,

“I believe I am, mother.”

CHAPTER VI.

PERHAPS the Doctor got on so well with Meta because she let him alone so much. She never seemed to be expecting from him what he was not able to give. There was a rare humility in all her ways. The thought never seemed to cross her mind that others should pay attention to her, still less that she should be plied with the fair speeches and flattering compliments which some women look for from those who call themselves their friends. As he learned to know her thoroughly, in those weeks of quiet home intercourse, he found, with more and more of glad content, that the likeness

which had so charmed him at first, was not the mere likeness of feature and manner, but of that sweet spirit which had stamped its impress on them both, moulding the one into a beauty less of form than expression, and infusing into the other that unaffected reverence and trustfulness which, even to very humble-minded men, is sometimes a woman's greatest attraction.

And perhaps it was just because Mrs. Waldemar expected so much from him, and so evidently laid herself out to command what she expected, that the Doctor was conscious of such a painful sense of embarrassment even when she was doing her utmost to fascinate him. The nervousness which had quite passed away now in Meta's presence, came upon him in its full force, and crushed him into absolute silence, or stumbling attempts at conversation infinitely

more awkward than silence, whenever Mrs. Waldemar, calling to inquire after the health of her darling, bore down upon him with that weight of affectionate impulsiveness on which she so greatly prided herself.

But Mrs. Waldemar attributed his shyness and restraint to quite a different cause. Ever since that well-weighed, deliberate reply of the Doctor's to sister Dorothy Ann's home-thrust about marrying again, she had been daily looking for the capitulation of the garrison. Her only wonder was, that it had held out so long. But then, as she said to herself, a shy man like the Doctor would feel a difficulty about terms of capitulation. He could much more easily decide upon them than put them into actual words. That her artillery had taken effect was evident enough from the manner in which each successive charge was received. It would have been

quite amusing, had it not been so very interesting, to note the change which her presence produced. How the Doctor, poor dear man! at once lost all his presence of mind, became awkward, hesitating, uncomfortable, unable to put even a couple of sentences together with anything like fluency; and fidgeted about if she addressed him, and appeared so anxious to please, and yet so painfully conscious—with the humility of true genius of course—that he could not succeed in doing it. All that sort of thing, Mrs. Waldemar said, told its own story, and proclaimed that under existing circumstances the citadel could not hold out much longer.

That visit of Meta's certainly did facilitate the intercourse between Percy Cottage and the College. Almost every day some trifling interchange of civilities took place. Either

Mrs. Waldemar, unable as she professed herself to control her anxiety for darling Meta, walked over to the College to make personal inquiries, frequently staying tea, and being escorted home by the Doctor; or Buttons was the bearer of her maternal affection in notes, generally addressed to Mrs. Ellesley, wherein her own delicate health, completely incapacitating her for walking exercise, or the frightful state of the roads in consequence of recent rain, was urged in excuse of what she hoped and trusted Meta would not consider a want of affection, the omission of a personal visit. And *would* Mrs. Ellesley send her back a particular account of the dear girl's health, a *very* particular account, because she felt so painfully anxious about her? It had been such a trouble to her, not being able to get over to the College herself; she could never tell dear Mrs. Ellesley what a

trouble it had been. And if it would not be trespassing too much upon the Governor's kindness, she should be so infinitely relieved to hear from himself what he thought of her darling Meta, and whether the change really was producing^d a favourable effect upon her. If he should happen to be passing the village in the course of the following day, and would look in upon them for five minutes, it would be such a very great comfort. She knew she was very weak and foolish to give herself so much needless fear, but——

And then she commended herself with such graceful impulsiveness to dear Mrs. Ellesley's womanly sympathies—she knew dear Mrs. Ellesley was so sweetly sympathetic, and would be able to understand *just* how she felt—that that kind-hearted old lady could not do less than despatch Bateson, or Fergus himself, with the basket-carriage, to

fetch Mrs. Waldemar over to the College, to the intent she might see for herself that Meta was improving a little, though not so much as they could hope; in consequence, most likely, of the state of the weather, which was still, even for that time of the year, unusually damp and cold.

So that really if Mrs. Danesborough, or any of the other Carriden-Regis busy-bodies who lived within a stone's throw of Percy Cottage, had been disposed to make remarks and draw conclusions, there did begin to be a little apparent foundation for them; scarcely a week passing in which the Doctor's carriage did not make its appearance in the village, for the purpose of bringing Mrs. Waldemar home from the College, or escorting her thither.

It was during one of these visits, arranged by Mrs. Ellesley as a means of allaying the

intense anxiety which Mrs. Waldemar must naturally feel concerning the health of her late dear husband's only child, that Miss Hacklebury, being left at home alone, was favoured with a call from Mrs. Goverly, who had come to inquire about another tutor for her boys; Stephen's successor having turned out so unsteady that he had had to be dismissed with even more incontinent haste than the divinity student.

The Goverlies were quite recent residents in the place, having only taken Ivy Lodge since the death of Mr. Waldemar, whose Millsmany practice Mr. Goverly had bought. Mrs. Goverly had risen, like her predecessor, to a position much above her original station, but she was not able, like her predecessor, to sustain and push that position by her own unaided cleverness. And she had not yet sufficiently secured her footing in the

best society of the place to be able to stand alone without much deference, and sometimes servility, to the opinions of others, and especially to those of Mrs. Waldemar, who had acted as lady-patroness to her on the occasion of Mrs. Goverly's introduction to the village, and who, on the strength of having put her into a respectable circle of society, had maintained a petty tyranny over her ever since in all matters of social etiquette. Indeed, the solicitor's wife was in that wholesome degree of subjection that she scarcely dare make a round of morning calls, much less get together a dinner-party, or have a few friends for cards and supper, without holding a previous consultation with her lady superintendent at Percy Cottage, and ascertaining that these proceedings would not be obnoxious to her.

It was Mrs. Waldemar who instructed Mrs.

Goverly what to do and what to leave undone for the due sustentation of her position in the village; who represented to her the absolute necessity of having a private tutor for her boys, and then secured the post for Stephen Garton; Mrs. Waldemar who, when, as she said, circumstances had altered cases, procured his dismissal on the ground of insufficient respectability, and dictated that note, which, along with her own, cost the divinity student so many bitter thoughts. In one word, Mrs. Waldemar used to take in Mrs. Goverly's thinking and do it for her, just as Jane Gubstone, the sexton's wife, used to take in the same lady's washing, sending it home got up and aired, and ready for immediate use. A great many people do the same sort of thing, and more still would do it, if only thinkers like Mrs. Waldemar were as plentiful as washerwomen, and would do

their work for as moderate a consideration.

And now the solicitor's wife, being in a worse dilemma with Stephen's successor than she had been with Stephen himself, dare no more take steps for replacing him without Mrs. Waldemar's sanction than she dare on her own responsibility have issued cards for a private dance, or ordered in a new suite of drawing-room furniture. She was very much disappointed then to find that, in consequence of her lady-superintendent's absence, her domestic arrangements must be held in abeyance for another day.

"You know, Miss Hacklebury," she said, "I am so awkwardly fixed with the children. I sometimes fancy it would be such a relief to send them to school, if Mrs. Waldemar would not think it unsuitable to our position. It is so extremely disagreeable to have to change one's dependents so

constantly, and this time things are even worse than that wretched affair of Mr. Garton's."

Mrs. Goverly, taking for granted that Miss Hacklebury looked at everything through Mrs. Waldemar's spectacles, thought she should best secure the good will of both ladies by speaking of Stephen's dismissal as "that wretched affair."

"I don't know what you mean," said sister Dorothy Ann, brusquely. "I never heard why young Mr. Garton left you at all."

"Dear me! you don't mean to say so? How very singular! But of course Mrs. Waldemar had too much consideration for him to mention it more than was quite necessary. She desired me not to speak about it publicly, and until this morning I assure you I have never opened my lips on the subject to anyone out of my own

house. Mrs. Waldemar is so very judicious. It was on account of his family, you know, Miss Hacklebury. Such dreadfully disreputable connections as we found out he had got! I was perfectly shocked when Mrs. Waldemar told me about them, and how he had thrust himself upon her kindness without having confessed who and what he was."

"Indeed!" said Dorothy Ann, tearing energetically away at a set of chintz bed-furniture which had to be ripped in pieces, brushed, shaken, and sent to the dyer that night, by the Millsmany carrier. Miss Hacklebury never professed to put her work away, whatever it might be, when callers came.

"*Indeed!*" she repeated after a short pause, "I never knew that there was anything disreputable about him, except that his mother

took in clear starching, and I don't call that a disgrace to any young man, if he has talent to rise above it. I always understood he was very good to his mother, as of course every young man ought to be, whatever she is for station."

"Oh! yes, *decidedly*," said Mrs. Goverly, beginning to feel rather at a loss how to steer judiciously between Miss Hacklebury's opinions, and those of Mrs. Waldemar, which did not appear to be identical. "I am sure, —I am quite sure I didn't mean to do anything unkind by the young man. And it was only because Mrs. Waldemar urged me to do it so *very* earnestly, almost, as I may say, with tears in her eyes, on account of our position in the place, that I dismissed him so suddenly."

"Oh! I daresay you did as you liked about it," said Dorothy Ann, venting more

and more of her increasing indignation on the unconscious chintz curtains. "And I don't suppose it made much difference to him, as things turned out. And so you sent him off because you found out that his mother took in washing!"

"Well, no, Miss Hacklebury; not exactly that. I'm sure I don't wish to deal harshly by any of my dependents"—Mrs. Goverly, like most other ignorant and low-bred people, always spoke of those to whom she paid money as her dependents—"I dismissed him because Mrs. Waldemar urged it upon me so, and I was so perfectly sure she knew what was proper to do in such cases. And besides, you know, Mrs. Waldemar showed me the note which she had written to Mr. Garton herself, forbidding him her house after what she had heard about his low connections; as indeed I think it was

very proper that she should do. Now don't you think so yourself, Miss Hacklebury?"

Miss Hacklebury might not hear this last question. She was rending the curtain seams asunder, and that was a noisy operation. At any rate, if she did hear it, she made no reply, and Mrs. Goverly continued,

"Very proper indeed, you must excuse me, Miss Hacklebury, for saying so, considering the duty she owed to Miss Waldemar; because of course there was no knowing what might happen if the two young people were much thrown together. A lady in Mrs. Waldemar's position cannot be too careful who she admits to her house on a footing of intimacy, when there is a young lady in the case."

Miss Hacklebury went on rending the curtains with a violence which, had sister Waldemar been in the room, would certainly

have sent her into hysterics. She understood everything now; why Stephen Garton had been sent away so abruptly, after Mr. Charnock began to be attentive, and why poor Meta had had those weary months of anxiety and suspense appointed to her. It was well that Dorothy Ann had that noisy unripping work as an outlet for her righteous indignation, otherwise some of it might have found vent in a few plain words, which would have been much more wholesome than soothing to Mrs. Goverly. She was too wise, however, to expose her sister's meanness, or to reproach the solicitor's wife for being so easily led by the opinions of other people. She only said, as she gathered together the successive breadths of blue chintz,

“Well, all I've got to tell you about it is this, that if you sent away Stephen Garton for nothing else than that his fore-elders

were not grand enough for you, you have done a vastly worse thing for yourself than for him. And I know that I'd ten times sooner have my children taught, if I had any, by a man who had not a rag of good descent to bless himself with, so long as he was a gentleman at heart, as I've believed Mr. Garton to be from the very first, than by the finest puppy of a genteel young man who could look a servant girl in the face with anything else than respect; much less behave to her as you say your new sprig of a tutor has behaved. You should have known a true gentleman when you had him."

Miss Hacklebury said no more about it. She worked off the rest of her wrath upon the bed-curtains, and as she was snatching and pulling them about with unwonted asperity, Mrs. Goverly sitting opposite to her and feeling very uncomfortable, Mrs. Walde-

mar came in from the College, all smiles and sweetness.

“So *glad* to see you, dear Mrs. Goverly, so *very* glad; but how unfortunate that you should have come when I was out. Buttons tells me you have been waiting such a *long* time. I am *so* distressed. And oh! Dorothy Ann, dear! how *could* you? And Mrs. Goverly here, too. She will think we are such *very* funny people. Now, don't you think, dear Mrs. Goverly, it is such a very funny thing for sister Dorothy Ann to be doing such work? But, you know, I say she is *too* kind. She quite spoils our upper-servant, by never letting her do anything of this sort.”

And Mrs. Waldemar, whose remarks had applied to the bed-curtains, turned from the solicitor's wife and faced about upon sister Dorothy Ann with a glance of sharp rebuke, quite different in its intensity of annoyance

from the elegant playfulness with which she had apologized to Mrs. Goverly for the state of the room.

But Dorothy Ann did not care. Sweeping the chintz up in her two arms, she steered towards the door, saying,

“Mrs. Goverly has come about another tutor, sister Waldemar. I don’t think her new one is a bit more respectable than Stephen Garton.”

And as she said it she looked at Mrs. Waldemar with a hard look, almost the first hard look she had ever given her. It said that she knew all about Stephen Garton’s dismissal now. Then she walked straight out of the room.

She did not come back until Mrs. Goverly had gone, and Buttons had come in to set the table for tea; and then Mrs. Waldemar, anxious perhaps to avert any allusion to the

tutor business, came down upon her with a voluble lecture on the impropriety of the blue chintz.

“So *disgusting*, sister Dorothy Ann, enough to ruin our position in the village. I do believe you do it on purpose to annoy me, because you know I am so delicately sensitive about such things. It will be all over the place now, that we can’t afford to put our upholstery out to do. It is positively *disgraceful* to think about. And if it had been Lady Fitzflannerly who had called, it would have been just the same.”

“Just the same,” replied Dorothy Ann, quietly, measuring out three spoonfuls of tea from the common end of the caddy, and then giving the tea-pot to Buttons, who seemed inclined to linger in the room. She rather liked to hear her mistress do a little scolding when it was not levelled at herself.

"That will do, Buttons. You can go," said Miss Hacklebury.

Buttons went, leaving the door open, though. Miss Hacklebury shut it.

"Sister Waldemar, you have deceived me about Stephen Garton. You told me he had been very rude in going away without saying good-bye to us, and you tried to make me believe that he had dropped us of his own accord, whilst all the time you knew that you had sent him away yourself; yes, and made Mrs. Goverly do the same too, because you said he wasn't respectable, and you wanted Meta to take up with Mr. Charnock instead."

Mrs. Waldemar's eyes flashed. It was wonderful how bright anger could make them, sometimes.

"Dorothy Ann! don't take upon yourself to contradict me. I know very well what I

am doing. I am the mistress in the house, and to come in as I did half an hour ago, and find the room in such a state! In the presence of Mrs. Goverly, too, who will chatter about it to everybody she meets. I wonder you are not ashamed of such disgraceful impropriety."

"If you mean that the blue chintz is disgraceful, sister Waldemar, I could mention other things that are more so. I never told you a lie about anything in my life, and I never deceived you, either."

"Dorothy Ann! how *can* you? and poor dear Mr. Waldemar in his grave, who would never allow anyone to speak unkindly to me, because he knew I couldn't bear it. It is very cruel of you. You are always trying to wound me, because you know that poor dear Mr. Waldemar is in his grave."

And Mrs. Waldemar began to sob.

“Yes, sister Waldemar, and he won’t lie alone in his grave long, if you don’t mind what you are about. You know as well as I do what is the matter with Meta, and if she never gets over this, the fault will lie at your door, and you will have to answer for it. She won’t be the first whose life you have spoiled by your scheming and contriving.

Mrs. Waldemar knew what her sister meant by that. She knew why the young man who used to come to see Dorothy Ann, more than thirty years ago, and write her love letters, the only love letters she ever cared for, had “got wrong,” as the saying is, and gone abroad, and fallen into bad courses; and at last died, unwept, unmourned for by anyone save the woman who, but for envy and jealousy of hers, should have been his wife. She had nothing to say. She

could not defend herself, and so she thought the best thing she could do would be to go into hysterics.

“Dorothy Ann! *Dorothy Ann!*” she gasped out, between sobs and jerks and other preliminary symptoms, “how *can* you? and you *know* I am so easily upset! My salts! bring me my salts! To talk about my darling Meta being taken away from me. Oh, it is *cruel* of you! It is *so* cruel!”

Dorothy Ann went to the cupboard for the sal-volatile, but she did not supplement the administration of it by any taking back of the words she had said, for she knew they were true words.

CHAPTER VII.

STEPHEN GARTON worked on at the College in Germany, as some men can work when all the brightness has been taken out of their lives. For, though people talk of hope as the mainspring of effort, and enlarge eloquently on the noble striving to which it has inspired, still it is true that the best work has ever been done for its own sake, and not for any joy or reward which lies beyond it. The truest triumphs ever won, are those for which no crown of laurel waits; and often the keenest spur to progress is the sharp, rude thrust of disappointment.

Two or three letters came from him for Dr. Ellesley whilst Meta was at the College. One of them contained an account of a grand commemoration which took place every year in the town where he was staying, and of a torchlight procession, in honour of some great poet who had been born there. Mrs. Ellesley read it to Meta one afternoon as they sat together in the library.

“Fergus told me that I was to be sure to let you hear it,” she said, “he thought you would be so much pleased with it. He was quite surprised when he read it himself, for he did not think that Stephen Garton had the sort of talent which would have made him describe anything so powerfully. You know, my dear, men who have an appetite for severe studies, as Mr. Garton has, are not always able to express themselves so

well about ordinary things, and Fergus has sometimes said to me that he was afraid Stephen's want of ready utterance would be a drawback to his popularity when he got into the ministry."

"Because, you see, my dear," continued Mrs. Ellesley, who felt at home on the subject, having had so much to do with ministers all her life, "a man's popularity does not always depend upon his depth of intellect. The generality of congregations don't like a man for his depth, but for his brightness, and if he can't set a thing prettily before them, they haven't patience with him. They can't bear the trouble of thinking over anything or puzzling it out for themselves, if the minister doesn't put it before them as clearly as possible. And so Fergus used to be afraid that Stephen might find his want of language a hindrance to him; but

he was quite surprised when he read this. It is just like a piece out of a story. It seems to carry you away so, and put the whole thing before your eyes. Now don't you think it is beautiful?"

Meta said it was very beautiful; quite, as Mrs. Ellesley said, like a piece out of a book; a great deal better than some pieces out of books.

"And then," continued Mrs. Ellesley, "he goes on to speak about his mother. Stephen always used to think so much about his mother, and that is why I have such a good opinion of him. You know some young men in his position would have been ashamed of their mother, but he never was; which, as I said before, is a very fine trait in his character. But, oh! my dear, if you want to hear Stephen spoken well of, you should hear his mother talk about him. Fergus

took me to see her one day when he went to pay her some money which Stephen had placed in his hands for her. You know he keeps her very comfortably now, and has taken lodgings for her in a respectable part of the town, and she has everything about her as pleasant as I could wish it myself. And if ever a mother did worship a son, she worships him. I used to think once that there never was a son like my own Fergus, but I do believe Mrs. Garton thinks as much of her boy as I do. It is a great comfort to have a good son."

Mrs. Ellesley seemed to fall into a reverie then, sometimes gazing into the fire, sometimes up to the portrait of Agnes Elliot, which hung, side by side with Fergus Ellesley's, in an ebony frame over the Doctor's writing-table. Most likely that portrait produced the train of thought which led her,

after the lapse of a few minutes, to make her next remark.

"I hope Stephen Garton will get a good wife. You know, my dear, they say when a man has been a good son, he is sure to be a good husband. It was so with Fergus."

"Yes," said Meta, listlessly, seeing that Mrs. Ellesley expected her to say something. "I should think Dr. Ellesley would be very kind to anyone."

"He was very kind to his wife, my dear. I don't think Agnes—that was his wife's name, you know—I don't think Agnes had a wish ungratified all the time they were married. And I think Mr. Garton will be just as good. I don't think there is any harm in telling you of it, now that he is away, but I used to fancy that Mr. Garton was rather attached to you, and I was a

little disappointed when he went to Germany so suddenly. Still it might only be a fancy. Should you like to be a minister's wife, my dear?"

"I don't know," said Meta. "I daresay it is as good as any other life."

"Yes, that it is. My husband was a minister, and I'm sure no one could be happier than we were. But you are looking tired, my dear. Perhaps you would like to go to sleep. When young people are not very strong, I think it is such an excellent thing for them to have a good long sleep in the afternoon. And you will feel refreshed too, when Fergus comes down out of his study to sit with us. Fergus is a very quiet man, but he enjoys a little society very much. I am sure it is quite a treat to him for you to be here, although he does not say anything about it as some gentlemen would."

And so the old lady would chat on peacefully, unsuspectingly, until, lulled by the monotonous sound, Meta dropped into a short slumber, and woke to find the kind face bending over her with a look of patient, motherly love.

Once it was not Mrs. Ellesley, but the Doctor who was sitting by her when she woke. She did not know that many and many a time he had sat there and watched her whilst she slept, dreaming perhaps, as she often did dream, of Stephen Garton. She did not know that it was Dr. Ellesley, the grave, quiet Governor, who used to steal in so silently sometimes, and draw the curtains so that the light should not disturb her, and wrap her shawls more warmly round her, and then, after a long, lingering, loving look, as silently steal out again, she never hearing his footstep. Still less did she know the

thoughts, tender, wistful, reverent thoughts of her, which stirred within him as he gazed upon the little pale face, so strangely like one over which for twenty years the daisies had been growing.

So the days wore on until Meta had been seven weeks at the College. When first she went, the mellow October sunlight used to slant through the reddening leaves of that long beech-tree avenue which led to the Carriden-Regis wood, and a few late autumn flowers showed a touch of colour here and there amongst the evergreens. Then came the grey fogs and the sharp November frosts, turning in a single night the golden red nasturtium flowers, with all their trailing wealth of leaves, into a shapeless, blackening mass, and withering up the hardy geraniums which, so long as there was a gleam of sunshine, had greeted it with their

cheerful scarlet bloom. And then the snow fell, lying whitely over the Millsmany moors, and with it came the short days and the long firelight evenings, so pleasant for those to whose ingle-nook no winter of solitude or neglect ever comes; who only need, to keep from them the sharpest cold they ever knew, drawn curtains and a redder glow of fire-light.

And still Meta stayed. The change had not done her very much good. At least so Miss Hacklebury thought, who tramped through the snow once or twice a week to see her. But yet she had been kept from the constant jar and worry which would have been her portion at home. If nothing had been put into her life, nothing had been taken out of it, and she had at least had all that kindness and good-will could do to cheer it. Even Mrs. Ellesley, noting her

white face and weary step, could not say that very much had been gained by the change; but she said, as Miss Hacklebury said, though with quite a different meaning, thinking only of Meta's bodily health, that she had been kept from something worse which might have seized upon her had she stayed at Carriden-Regis all through the damp autumn and early winter.

But now that the bleak winds and frosts had set in, and the College, standing as it did exposed to the Millsmany moors, was even a less desirable residence than the more sheltered village, for anyone who required care, Mrs. Ellesley felt that she could not urge her longer stay. And so it was arranged that she should return home just before Christmas, Mrs. Waldemar, who had heard that Dr. Ellesley was leaving the College about New Year's Day, to stay away

until the students re-assembled, protesting that she could not exist any longer without her darling Meta; really life had been almost insupportable to her since the dear child went away.

The Doctor brought her home one snowy December afternoon, and stayed all the rest of the evening at the cottage. Stayed without making the slightest attempt to excuse himself on the ground of previous engagements, or anything of that sort. Another symptom of surrender, Mrs. Waldemar suspected. Indeed, during the whole of Meta's visit to the College, things had been tending in that direction, and she was quite sure it was only the poor dear man's painful hesitation and shyness, and a natural inaptitude which he had for coming to the point in any important matter, which had kept the citadel from capitulating weeks ago.

The siege was becoming rather tedious certainly, but these very shy people must be humoured a little, and the position was worth waiting for. Besides, poor dear old Mrs. Ellesley was growing so very infirm, almost entirely confined to the house, and though very intelligent yet, and retaining possession of her faculties to an actually wonderful extent, still, so far as bodily energy and vigour went, she was becoming quite the old lady, quite unable to do anything towards sustaining her son's position in society; and therefore propriety, if nothing else, would compel him before long to make a change in his establishment.

She believed, too, that Dorothy Ann had begun to have some notion of how things were likely to end, for she had been so remarkably captious and irritable of late, really almost impertinent sometimes in her

remarks, especially since she had scented out that little plan about Meta and Mr. Charnock. Just as if it was not the most desirable thing in the world to bring the two young people together, if possible, and as if a match of that kind would not have been a thousand times better for the girl than a long, tedious, lingering engagement with a man whose prospects were so very uncertain as Mr. Garton's; even allowing, that with all his disadvantages of birth and position, he could be said to have any prospects at all. Jealousy on Dorothy Ann's part, that was just what it was. No doubt she would have liked the position for herself, and was annoyed that anyone else should take it. Really the ill-feeling and selfishness which some people manifested about their personal interests, was lamentable.

And then Mrs. Waldemar, when she had said good-bye to the Doctor, smoothed her ringlets and wondered whether it would be expedient to purchase any more mourning. She rather thought not.

That night Dr. Ellesley and his mother were sitting by the library fire, alone together for the first time since Meta came to them in October. The room seemed strangely still without her. Though she was never very brilliant or entertaining, still her presence diffused a certain peacefulness, which was more satisfying than either brilliance or entertainment, and never, like them, became wearisome. Meta had the gift, possessed by few women, of making the place where she dwelt a home. Even the atmosphere of Percy Cottage gathered a tinge of geniality when she came there, and the eight weeks of her absence from it had

seemed, to all except Mrs. Waldemar, like a dreary winter time.

“Fergus, don’t we miss her very much?” said Mrs. Ellesley, after she and her son had been sitting in silence for nearly an hour.

Fergus knew who his mother meant, though Meta’s name was unspoken. Through all that long spell of silence, the thought of her had been lying quietly in his heart.

“Yes, mother.”

And that was all he said. He was such a very undemonstrative man. Mrs. Ellesley, living with him from day to day, little dreamed how much the inner life had changed for him, whilst the outer life was calm and unruffled as ever.

“I am afraid it did not do her much good,” Mrs. Ellesley continued, “staying here with us. I thought she looked very frail when

she went away. Do you think she will ever get better, Fergus?"

"Get better," said Dr. Ellesley, quickly, almost sharply, "of course she will get better. What made you ask such a question?"

And then he added, seeing that his mother appeared surprised, as well she might, by the sudden change in his voice,

"I beg your pardon, mother, but your words startled me. I never thought of her being seriously ill. I quite believe she will soon be strong again. You know, it is only the season that tries her."

Mrs. Ellesley shook her head.

"Well, I hope so. I'm sure I hope so. It would be a great grief to me, and I think you would be very sorry, too, Fergus, if anything happened to her. But you know she reminded me so much of our poor Agnes,

that autumn before she died. I used to watch Meta lying there on that sofa, with her head just where yours is now, until I could almost fancy that it was Agnes come back again. And your poor wife was just twenty when she died; and at the same time of the year it was too, that she began to waste away."

"Don't, mother, *don't*," said the doctor, with no sharpness in his voice now but the sharpness of pain. "Don't talk in that way."

Mrs. Ellesley stopped. She knew how tenderly Fergus had loved that young wife of his, and she thought he could not bear to hear her death mentioned, even now. And so she brought the conversation back to Meta.

"I wish we had not let her go away. But then of course her mother must have missed her very much all the time. Per

haps it was selfish of us to want to keep her. But the room doesn't seem like home, now that she is away, does it, Fergus?"

"No," said the Doctor, slowly. "It is not at all like home, now."

And he felt, for the first time, that it never would be home to him again, until Meta came to stay in it always.

CHAPTER VIII.

AFTER Meta returned to Percy Cottage, a whole month slipped quietly away, without anything particular happening, save that her eyes grew dimmer, and her step heavier; and though she made no complaint, but that which wrote itself day by day in her white, worn face, still, a person of ordinary penetration might easily have told that, unless some change took place before long, she must either die, or live out the rest of her time in that almost worse than death, a life from which all hope and spring and interest and energy have gone.

The Doctor went away for three or four

weeks. Rodney Charnock also went away, greatly to Mrs. Waldemar's disappointment, for she quite reckoned upon reviving that intimacy as soon as Meta returned, and bringing it to a satisfactory culmination. So that now she had really nothing to do but to indulge in hysterics, and think about her nervous system; to which she accordingly devoted such an amount of attention that she had none left for the state of her daughter's health.

One thing, however, did happen, which, considering its after influence on the destinies of at least two people, may be chronicled as something important.

Sister Dorothy Ann had some friends living at Amberley Cove, a quiet little town on the sea coast, about a hundred miles south of Millsmany. She never corresponded with them; indeed she scarcely ever

corresponded with anyone, having a great dislike to express her sentiments through the medium of pen and ink; but at regular intervals they used to send each other newspapers, by way of remembrance, and it so chanced that during this month of January, which followed Meta's return from the College, a copy of the *Amberley Cove Gazette* was sent to Miss Hacklebury, who, amusing her spare time one afternoon by glancing down the column of local intelligence, lighted upon a paragraph, which, as she said afterwards, almost made her jump out of her chair with surprise.

The paragraph stated that in consequence of the minister of one of the Dissenting chapels in Amberley Cove having fallen into ill-health, his congregation had subscribed a sum for his removal to a warmer climate, and were at present supplying his

place by such occasional ministers as they could have from neighbouring towns. They were hoping, however, in the course of a week or two, to secure the services, for one month, of Mr. Garton, the late Burton prize-man of Carriden-Regis College, who had partly promised to come over and help them during his time of rest from college duties in Germany. Then followed a eulogium upon his talents, and an eloquent description of the treat which might be expected by the good people of Amberley Cove in listening to the gifted young stranger. A description which, had it been read by Stephen Garton himself, would most effectually have kept him out of the place. But fortunately he never saw it.

Miss Hacklebury did not make a fuss over the news. She never made a fuss over anything. She only put the paper quietly away,

and at a convenient opportunity cut the paragraph out, hoping that it might be useful some day. It only said that Mr. Garton might possibly supply the place of the Amberley Cove minister, but she knew that Mrs. Ellesley would be sure to hear if Mr. Garton was really coming back to England; and so to Mrs. Ellesley she went, in the course of a few days, when she thought that the affair might probably have been settled. Of course if he came to England at all, he would come to Carriden-Regis; and if he came to Carriden-Regis, he should not go away again without having had the chance of clearing himself up with Meta, let Mrs. Waldemar, or let who would, stand in the way of such an explanation.

Mrs. Ellesley had had a letter from her son that very morning, enclosing one from Stephen Garton, in which he said that he

had consented to spend his few weeks of college leisure in supplying for an invalided minister at Amberley Cove; but as the distance was so great, and his duties would most likely be numerous, he should only come over to Millsmany for a day to see his mother, and then spend an hour or two with them at the College; not more than that. He was coming to Amberley Cove early in February, and the time he stayed there would depend on the arrangements of the college.

“I don’t think he is very fond of this neighbourhood,” said Mrs. Ellesley as she folded up the letter and put it away again. “My son wrote to ask him to spend his Christmas here, if the professors gave him time enough to make it advisable for him to come so far; but he quite declined the invitation, and said that he intended to study

during the recess. I know Fergus rather wished him to come back here again, after he had been a few months in Germany, but he did not seem to give in to the proposal at all, though he always had paid such very great respect to anything that my son suggested. You know, if it had not been for my son, he would never have got into the college at all, and therefore a little deference to his opinions was only proper. But Fergus did not urge it. He thought most likely he had his own reasons for wishing to remain abroad. We could always trust Stephen to do what he believed was right."

"Yes, I should think so," said Miss Hacklebury rather grimly. "He always struck me as being a very conscientious young man."

"Very conscientious indeed," replied Mrs.

Ellesley, "only peculiar. Most young men would have had a pride in coming back to the place where they had won such honours as he had won here. But Stephen never was like other people, and I don't believe he ever will be. Why, if any other man had got that Burton scholarship, he would have been almost overpowered with the honours and the congratulations and the dinner and the fine speeches, but Stephen took it all so wonderfully quietly. Nay, if he had lost it instead of gaining it, he could not have been more self-possessed.

Miss Hacklebury thought she understood a little about that now, but she wisely held her peace until a more convenient season for explaining matters, and Mrs. Ellesley continued,

"And yet I'm sure it isn't because he can't feel, for I don't know a tenderer

heart anywhere than Stephen Garton's, unless it is my son's. I always used to say that Stephen Garton and my son were alike in tender-heartedness and in goodness to their mothers, if they were alike in nothing else; as of course they cannot be, Fergus belonging as he does to a good family, and having all the advantages of a refined training, which you know, Miss Hacklebury, make a difference to a man, don't they?"

And the folds of Mrs. Ellesley's black satin dress glanced again as she drew herself up, not without a becoming air of dignity. She loved to think of her good family and her gentle breeding, and she had the notion which gentlewomen always have—perhaps it is a right notion too—that these things give a certain finish to the character which nothing else can impart. Mrs. Ellesley said

she could tell at once by a man's bearing and deportment whether or not he had a good ancestry, just the same as she could tell real old family silver from the very best plated articles that were ever manufactured. And she held slightly to the opinion—though not at all so far as Stephen Garton was concerned—that people of moderately good descent had more honour about them than those who had risen from the ranks, more uprightness and candour; and that respectable ancestry added to the moral bearing of a man, as well as to his external deportment.

Miss Hacklebury did not know much about that. Their own mother had belonged to a good family, though come down in the world. The pea-green china, and one or two pieces of old plate, and a quilted satin petticoat, and a few wondrously fine damask cloths, told their tale of former gentility.

But Dorothy Ann was free to confess that so far as she herself was concerned, the good breeding had not worked itself out into anything like grace of deportment; neither had it put much honour and straightforwardness into sister Waldemar. She rather thought that people made their characters for themselves, instead of inheriting them, along with pea-green china, and damask table-cloths; and no amount of ancestry could give an upright bearing unless there was an upright heart—which did not come of ancestry—for it to hold itself by.

However that might be, Dorothy Ann tramped home again through the sleet and snow of that January morning, feeling more hopeful than she had felt for many a week past. She fancied she knew of a medicine now for Meta, which would be better than all the herb tonics and strengthening mix-

tures in the world. She was not much of a schemer, and she could not edge her way round to a thing with the smooth, gliding dexterity of sister Waldemar; but she made up her mind, as she came home from Carriden-Regis College, that before February was out, even if Amberly Cove had been more than fifty times as far away, Stephen and Meta should have an understanding.

How, she could not exactly see just yet. She had quite reckoned upon Stephen's coming to Carriden-Regis for at least one day whilst he was in England, and since she saw that paragraph in the *Amberley Cove Gazette*, she had been trying to devise some plan by which he and Meta might be brought together. But still she could quite understand why he did not like to come to the College under present circumstances. It showed that at any rate he had not for-

gotten. It was not his place to seek for an explanation. No man with Stephen Garton's pride and independence would, and she liked him all the better for it. But still she was determined that the explanation should be given, and she trusted to Providence for ways and means of bringing it about.

Whilst Dorothy Ann was turning this matter over in her own mind, Dr. Ellesley, rolling along in the express train from London to Millsmany, was turning over a matter of quite a different kind in *his* mind. One which, though at first it seemed to upset Miss Hacklebury's hopes completely, did really in the end facilitate their accomplishment. For, as the Doctor, though slow in his movements, was a man who, when once he had settled upon a thing, did not hesitate in the working out of it, this matter

which had been revolving itself in his mind came to a practical issue within twenty-four hours of his arrival at the College. Came to a practical issue in the shape of a note to Mrs. Waldemar, in which he requested the favour of a private interview with that lady, on a matter of considerable importance.

The bearer was instructed to wait for a reply. Mrs. Waldemar, with becoming dignity, assented to the Doctor's request, and named Thursday afternoon at three o'clock—the hour Miss Hacklebury always went into her district—for the momentous conference.

Of course Mrs. Waldemar knew perfectly well why Dr. Ellesley desired a private interview. She had been expecting something of the kind ever since that afternoon, nearly three months ago, when he had so explicitly stated his intention of marrying

again. Only, poor man, having lived out of the world so long, and being naturally deficient in self-possession, he had felt it difficult to bring matters to a crisis. Now, however, he had done the most suitable thing that could have been done, under the circumstances. With an admirable consideration for her nervous system, which he had doubtless perceived to be so delicately constructed that the slightest shock would disturb it, he had taken this method of gradually preparing her for the subject which he wished to introduce, so that she might not be dangerously agitated by the abrupt mention of it. And also perhaps, that having had time to weigh the matter beforehand, she might be able to give a definite answer, without keeping him in any further suspense.

It was altogether most suitably arranged. She could not have suggested anything bet-

ter herself. The Doctor had raised himself wonderfully in her estimation by his judicious forethought. Such care and consideration, such deference to her convenience, such respectful hesitancy in intruding himself upon her notice, spoke volumes for the position of authority which she should afterwards be able to assume. A man who presented his suit so modestly and graciously was not likely to fail hereafter in that complete submission which Mrs. Waldemar was resolved to exercise over the fortunate individual to whom she committed the privilege of restoring her to that state of matrimonial felicity from which the death of the late poor dear Mr. Waldemar had displaced her.

Accordingly the solicitor's widow dispatched the note, and then took the omnibus to Millsmany, to provide herself with a new head-dress for Thursday.

CHAPTER IX.

THE momentous day arrived, and with the stroke of three o'clock, the Doctor's somewhat confused, uncertain double knock was heard at the door of Percy Cottage.

Meta had been dispatched to the Rectory, to spend an hour or two with dear Mrs. Gilbertson. Dorothy Ann was safe in her district, dispensing herb tonics to the old women, and giving the younger ones good advice as to the management of measles, hooping-cough, chicken-pox, and other infantile disorders. Attired in black silk, fastened at the throat by a gold brooch containing the miniature of her late lamented

husband, her raven ringlets shaded by the new head-dress whose lappets of lace were confined by two massive coral pins, contrasting artistically with the clear olive tints of her complexion, a black lace shawl thrown gracefully over her shoulders, a vinaigrette suspended by a slender chain from her neck, in case she should feel called upon to give way, a handkerchief slightly embroidered with black tucked with careless negligence into her velvet waistband, and a dainty piece of embroidery in her hand, Mrs. Waldemar had been seated in the drawing-room for a full half hour, waiting the Doctor's arrival.

With a smile of winning sweetness, just tinged for the occasion with almost maidenly diffidence, she received her guest and placed him in the easy chair opposite the window, seating herself with her back to the light,

in which position her complexion showed to the best advantage.

“It was so *very* kind of you, Dr. Ellesley, to come so far, and on such a bitterly cold day too. You don’t *know* how these northerly winds make me shiver.”

And Mrs. Waldemar drew her lace shawl coquettishly over her shoulders; no one could manage a shawl with more elegance than the solicitor’s widow.

“Now, *do* let me get you something, for I am sure you must be so *very* cold. Will you let me give you a glass of wine, or is there anything in the *world* that you would prefer? *Do* say now if there is anything I can get for you.”

“I—I am much—no thank you, I will not take anything.” And the Doctor began to fidget uneasily in his chair, a fact which Mrs. Waldemar did not fail to notice.

“Not anything at all, Doctor?” she said, looking at him with appealing simplicity. “Now that is so naughty of you, for you know how *delighted* I should be to get anything for you. But perhaps you don’t feel the cold as I do. You know I never could *endure* a severe atmosphere. It chills me. Oh! it *does* chill me so. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to say I was born for the sunny south; he always used to take me away to some sheltered spot when the northerly winds began to prevail; poor dear man! he was so careful of me. I am sure he quite spoiled me, for he made me so very dependent upon care and attention.”

And Mrs. Waldemar looked pathetically into the fire. Dr. Ellesley looked into it too, not knowing exactly what else to do under the circumstances. Mrs. Waldemar always extinguished him with her flow of

impulsiveness. Any wandering fragments of sentences that might have been struggling for expression within him, took refuge in oblivion as soon as she bore down upon him with the mellifluous gurgle of her eloquence. The Governor of Carriden-Regis College, who could hold a discussion with any learned doctor in the three kingdoms, who could dive into all the mysteries of Hebrew, Greek, Logic, Divinity, Metaphysics, mathematics and Calculation of Forces, and prelect before his assembled students with a clearness, forcefulness and precision which none of the other professors could excel, or even equal, was completely floored in the presence of an artful, fascinating woman. His ideas took flight, his conversational powers collapsed, he became silent, stupid and awkward as any school-boy set to do the agreeable to an incipient belle.

Mrs. Waldemar was rather pleased than otherwise with the Doctor's evident uncomfortableness, which only increased as she played her artillery of smiles and blandishments upon him. At last, however, he did manage to jerk out something to the purpose.

"You are aware—at least, I think I said; that is to say, I gave you to understand, that; in fact my call to-day—I came to converse with you on a matter of considerable importance."

The Doctor hurried nervously to the end of this last sentence, lest it should desert him as the others had done. Mrs. Waldemar appeared undecided at first whether to assume an air of diffidence, or to confront him with a gaze of unconscious wonder. At last she decided that unconscious wonder would be most effective.

"Oh! dear, yes," she said, as though suddenly remembering the Doctor's previous note. "You *did* say it was something important, but nothing serious I hope, Dr. Ellesley. I do hope it was nothing serious. Poor dear Mrs. Ellesley. Surely she is not ill, or anything of that kind! *Do* tell me now, Dr. Ellesley, that it is nothing serious."

"Oh! no, nothing serious," replied the Doctor, still moving restlessly in his chair. "I am glad—I think on the whole—at least, I believe Mrs. Ellesley was never, or at any rate she is as well as usual, and desired her kind remembrance to you."

"*Thank you*," and Mrs. Waldemar smiled affectionately, "Mrs. Ellesley is *very* kind. I am very much obliged to her. *Do* pray give my *warmest* love to her, and say that I hope to come and see her *very* soon. In-

deed, I feel I have been quite *naughty* not to have called before, but you know, Doctor, for any one who is not very strong, these northerly winds are such a terrible obstacle to social intercourse."

And then there was an uncomfortable pause. The Doctor was the first to break it, but he did so even more awkwardly than before.

"I called upon you in connection with a very—or at least I wished to lay before you a very important subject. That is to say, I hope I may assure myself of your good will, or at any rate I wished to ascertain your views on the subject. And—and I hope I may be able to—to induce you to give your——"

Here Mrs. Waldemar began to think that diffidence would be effective, and she looked diffident accordingly; whilst the Doctor con-

tinued, still in a painfully halting manner, to lay before her the subject of his errand.

“To give me your consent—at least to give the subject your favourable consideration.”

“Oh! Dr. Ellesley, you take me by surprise,” and Mrs. Waldemar’s feigned embarrassment was almost equal to the Doctor’s real display of the same, “but I assure you *anything* I can do for you. Excuse me if I do not express myself very clearly, but the suddenness of your remarks, you know—and I am so easily unnerved. But don’t let me interrupt you.”

“Thank you. As I was going,—that is to say there cannot be a doubt that there are—there are difficulties connected with the proposal I was—was about to make.”

Meta, no doubt, thought Mrs. Waldemar.

Of course a grown-up daughter *would* be a difficulty.

"Yes, Doctor, there *are* difficulties. There certainly *are* difficulties. And yet, you know, where there is a genuine attachment——"

"Yes," said the Doctor quickly, "a genuine attachment overcomes all difficulties; and although Miss Waldemar is only young at present——"

"That is an obstacle which is continually lessening, is it not, Doctor?" said Mrs. Waldemar, now venturing to glance into the Doctor's face with a smile of mingled archness and simplicity. "*Continually* lessening. Indeed, Dorothy Ann was only remarking the other day, that darling Meta and myself were more like sisters than anything else; people, you know, do carry their age so *very* differently."

And Mrs. Waldemar paused, in order that

the Doctor might, if he felt so disposed, put in a complimentary remark upon that subject. But he did not avail himself of the opportunity, so she continued, still with the same sweet smile and winning simplicity,

“I am sure it would be *very* much to her advantage if she could be suitably settled. I should give my consent with the *utmost* pleasure to anything *really* suitable. You know, Dr. Ellesley, she is such a charmingly affectionate little creature. Oh! I can't *tell* you how charmingly affectionate she is, and of such a *sweet* disposition. I really sometimes think that it is the greatest wonder in the *world* that some one has not come and run away with my treasure. Now don't you think, Doctor, that it is the greatest wonder in the *world* I have been allowed to keep my treasure so long?”

Perhaps the Doctor did think so. Most

men who seek the jewel of a fair young girl's heart, either do think or ought to think, with the fine humility of honest love, that it *is* a wonder the treasure has not been claimed and won before they sought it as their own. But Dr. Ellesley was silent upon that subject; only his face brightened as Mrs. Waldemar held forth with such pretty impulsiveness on the subject of Meta's amiability, and he began to present his suit with somewhat more of ease and self-possession, seeing that the lady with whom for the present the granting or denying of it lay, seemed to look not unfavourably upon so much of it as he had already advanced.

“Then I may hope, Mrs. Waldemar, that the difficulty which I have mentioned will not be insuperable, because I—that is to say, I trust we should both of us have sufficient

—or at least I think we should agree to bear and forbear in any trifling differences of opinion which might possibly arise.”

“Dear, good man, he is thinking of my Church preferences,” said Mrs. Waldemar to herself. “He knows very well that it is not every woman of society, and with a position too like mine, who would choose to marry a Dissenter. How very, *very* considerate of him!”

And then she hastened to put a stop to the Doctor's fears on that subject.

“Oh! yes, Dr. Ellesley. I am *quite* sure that your own good sense and feeling will suggest to you the course which should be taken. Though still, as you say, it is a *slight* difficulty, *only* a slight difficulty, Dr. Ellesley, so far as that is concerned. I think I may venture to say to any one for whom I entertain so profound a respect as

for yourself, that it would *only* be a *slight* difficulty."

And Mrs. Waldemar trifled gracefully with her embroidery for a few seconds, thinking that the Doctor, in spite of his pitiful awkwardness in matters of this nature, *must* come to the point before long. So he did, though not exactly in the way she had anticipated.

"Thank you. I feared you might have looked upon what I have mentioned in a more serious light. Then, Mrs. Waldemar, I may hope for your consent in seeking your daughter Meta as my wife."

"My daughter Meta as your wife?"

Mrs. Waldemar repeated the words slowly, as though she did not quite understand their meaning.

"Yes, to be my wife," said the Doctor.
"Since that evening, nearly a year ago

now, when at your request I brought her home from Millsmany, I have loved her very sincerely, and with your permission I hope to win a return of my love."

Mrs. Waldemar was a first-rate woman of the world, keen, acute, far-seeing when her own interests were involved, quick to discern the best mode of action, and prompt to follow it. When hysterics were the best things to go into, she could go into them at a minute's notice; when self-command was better, she could put her nerves out of the way, and assume the rigidity of a bar of wrought iron. In this case what she had to do was to avoid betraying the least surprise or excitement, but, above all, not to let a single drop of the bitterness which Dr. Ellesley's words had produced ooze out into speech. The case was not hopeless, after all, though assuming at present such

a different aspect from that for which she had prepared herself.

"I am *very* sorry," she said, without any change of voice or manner, save a slight touch of sympathy in both, which her unwillingness to give the Doctor pain might have produced. "I am *very* sorry, but now that you have laid your proposal distinctly before me, I do not see how I can, consistently with my duty to the late Mr. Waldemar, give my consent to a union which, to say the least of it, appears so very unsuitable. I—I have the *warmest* respect for you, Dr. Ellesley. Be assured my opinion of you is *everything* that you could wish it to be."

The Doctor bowed.

"*Everything* that you could wish it to be. Indeed, the more intimate our intercourse becomes, the more I am convinced of the

treasure which Providence has bestowed upon me in your friendship—a friendship which I sincerely trust you will not allow to be broken in consequence of this unfortunate interview. But, Dr. Ellesley, Meta is so *very* young, and her character is, as I may say, entirely unformed, and she appears to me the very *last* person in the world who is capable of meeting your requirements as a wife.”

“That,” said the Doctor, with a little quiet dignity in his manner, “is for me to decide, and I have come to a decision.”

“Of course,” said Mrs. Waldemar, “of course.” Whatever else she did just now, she must not offend the Doctor, and put a stop to their friendship. “I quite appreciate the kindness and indulgence which has led you to overlook her inexperience; but at the same time I do not think that I should

be acting justly by her, or by my late dear husband, or indeed that I should be acting the part of a true friend to yourself, if I encouraged you in a suit which can only end in disappointment. But do not misunderstand me."

And Mrs. Waldemar, rising, laid her hand impressively on the Doctor's arm. He, too, had risen, and was preparing to depart.

"I do *beg* of you not to misunderstand me, or to think that in what I am doing now I have any other motive than your happiness, and the welfare of my darling Meta, my poor dear husband's only child."

Here Mrs. Waldemar had recourse to her vinaigrette.

"And I do most *sincerely* hope, Dr. Ellesley, that you will endeavour to forget what has passed between us this morning, and permit our friendship still to continue

on its former footing. It does distress me so, to lose a friend. I cannot *bear* to lose a friend, Dr. Ellesley, I cannot indeed. *Do* tell me now that you will endeavour to forget what has passed."

"I am much obliged to you," said the Doctor.

"Oh! no, Dr. Ellesley, no indeed!" replied Mrs. Waldemar, following the Doctor to the door, whither he was steering his course. "It is I who should express my thanks for the unmerited favour which you have done me, in seeking such a connection with my darling Meta. I do *assure* you I should have felt it an honour, an unspeakable honour, to have been connected with you in any way. And *do* let me assure you that it gives me more uneasiness than I can express to be the means of grieving you. But you may trust my honour, Dr. Ellesley, you may indeed, that not a syllable of

this shall be breathed to anyone. And do now——”

Here Mrs. Waldemar's sweet impulsiveness returned.

“*Do* now tell me that you will try to forget what I have said. I do feel that it is so *naughty* of me to have done anything to give you pain, but I do assure you I have done it for your good, and you don't *know* how gladly I would have promoted your wishes if my duty to the late poor Mr. Waldemar had not forced upon me a different course of action. You know I *must* do my duty, Dr. Ellesley. I cannot *rest* unless I *know* that I am doing my duty.”

Dr. Ellesley had reached the lobby now, and Buttons, hearing his step, had come to open the door for him.

“I thank you, Mrs. Waldemar; you are very kind,” was all he said. And after that he walked sadly and quietly home.

CHAPTER X.

“DOROTHY ANN.”

This was said in a snappish tone, very different to the mellifluous accents in which Mrs. Waldemar had taken leave of Dr. Ellesley, only an hour or two ago. Indeed, the tone spoke of nothing but unmitigated disagreeableness on the part of the elegant lady who used it.

“Dorothy Ann.”

“Well, sister Waldemar.”

“Meta must have change of air. It’s the very thing that she wants, is change of air.”

“To be sure. I told you that ever so

long ago," said Dorothy Ann, never moving a muscle of that sober, common-sense face, into which of late there had come a touch of softening anxiety.

"You did nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Waldemar petulantly. "It was I who said from the very first that she wanted change; and she must have it directly, or I shall be losing my darling, I'm *sure* I shall."

And Mrs. Waldemar's hand went instinctively to the pocket where she kept her salts.

"It was you who said no such thing," replied Dorothy Ann. "I noticed her looking poorly last September, and said that she ought to have change, and that was why I was so glad when Mrs. Ellesley asked her to go over to the College, because I knew they would be good to her, and comfort her up there. Mrs. Ellesley's as kind a woman as ever I saw, and has taken to Meta wonder-

fully. And so has the Doctor too, she says, although he don't care much for society in a general way."

Mrs. Waldemar began to sob hysterically.

"I'm sure it's all your fault. You never—have any sort—of sympathy with me."

"What is all my fault?" asked Dorothy Ann. "I'm sure it isn't my fault that Meta is out of health. I'm sorry enough for it."

"I never said it was. But it's your fault—that I have to—give way so. You know I can't *bear* contradiction, and so rude, too—*just* like you. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar—*never* used to do it. He always managed me—so beautifully."

"Then I'm sure I wish he had been spared to you a little longer, sister Waldemar, for it's more than anyone else can do to manage you at all, to say nothing of doing it beautifully."

Of course this remark, which was perhaps a little more pointed than it ought to have been, produced a regular attack. Miss Hacklebury administered the sal-volatile as usual, without any admixture of sympathy, though; and after the jerks and screams had somewhat subsided, she returned to the subject in hand—some sort of change for Meta.

“Well, sister Waldemar, then, about Meta going from home.”

Mrs. Waldemar always came out of her hysterics in a sweetly submissive frame of mind, with the air of an oppressed and deeply injured woman, who is prepared to bow meekly to any amount of oppression from those hard-hearted domestic tyrants, male or female, who cannot appreciate the requirements of a delicate nervous organization. And so when Dorothy Ann returned to the charge—returned to it, too, in that

blunt, abrupt manner, Mrs. Waldemar replied, with a few gentle sobs,

“Oh! just as you please, Dorothy Ann. Don't think of me in the least. I know I'm only a very foolish, weak creature. I dare-say you are quite right never to take any notice of what I say.”

That sort of reply worried Dorothy Ann more than a gust of downright ill-temper. And she knew that sister Waldemar only resorted to it to get her own way more effectually.

“Just as I please is just as nobody pleases,” she said. “Is Meta to go from home, or is she not?”

“Dorothy Ann, how can you?” and the preliminary twitches came on again in a milder form. “How *can* you be so cruel and unfeeling, and you *know* my nerves are all on a quiver, so that I cannot bear the *least* excitement.”

"Well, sister Waldemar, I'm not contradicting you that I know of. I only want you to say whether Meta is to go away or not."

"Oh! yes, pray don't take any notice of my feelings. Trample on them as much as ever you like. I know I am too weak to make any resistance. Perhaps when you have lost me you will begin—to think—you might have—treated me—a little better. People do think so—when it is—too late."

"Sister Waldemar, it's Meta that we have to think about losing now, and I want to know if she is to go away, because, if she is, I'll take her."

"Yes, she is, and you may do just as you like about it. I don't want you to think anything about my convenience. I know I'm not worth taking any trouble about. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to say I should never find anyone——"

Miss Hacklebury had heard enough about poor dear Mr. Waldemar, so she gathered up her work and went out of the room. She knew there was nothing like letting her sister alone when she fell into the ag-grieved submission track.

She lay awake all that night, a most unusual thing for Dorothy Ann, who prided herself upon being able to sleep like a top. But the loss of rest did not appear to have affected her for the worse, for she came down the next morning as brisk as a bee, and told sister Waldemar how she had arranged everything for Meta's change of air.

"We'll go down to Amberley Cove, sister Waldemar," she said, as she measured out the three spoonsful of tea from the common end of the caddy, and proceeded to cut up the bread and butter with unwonted

vigour and cheerfulness. "It came into my mind last night that that would be the very place of all others for us to go to, so nicely sheltered as it is from the east wind, and reasonable as the lodgings will be at this time of the year, in consequence of it not being the regular season. Don't you think Amberley Cove will be the very place for her, sister Waldemar?"

Sister Waldemar replied, for she had not quite got over the petulance attendant upon her last attack, that if Dorothy Ann had made up her mind there was no need to consult *her* at all about it. She had quite given over now, she said, expecting to be consulted about anything. Dorothy Ann could do just as she liked about it. If her opinion had been asked before the thing was settled, she should have said that Amberley Cove was a very second-rate place, almost

low, she might say, for people in their position to think of visiting. She should feel quite ashamed if Mrs. Gilbertson, or Lady Fitzflannerly, or any of the upper-class families of the village, found out that Meta had gone to a place like Amberley Cove for change of air. Brighton or Llandudno or Hastings would have sounded so much more stylish. But Dorothy Ann could do just as she liked about it. She had no doubt Dorothy Ann would not mind about being second-rate, so long as it was cheap.

“Not at all,” said Miss Hacklebury cheerfully; she was determined not to be put out of temper this morning. “Appearances are one thing with me, and comfort is another. You can tell our grand friends if you like, that we have gone to Amberley Cove because of having friends living there, which makes it pleasanter than a strange

place. Or I daresay Mrs. Ellesley would be very glad to have Meta to the College again. She was only saying last time I was there that if ever Meta wanted a change she was to go and stop with them as long as she liked; they enjoyed having her with them so much before. Only it struck me that the sea would be better this time."

"Of course it would," said Mrs. Waldemar sharply; "I should never think of trespassing upon Mrs. Ellesley's kindness again in that way. And if it had not been for your mentioning Amberley Cove just now in that disagreeable dictatorial way, just as if Meta belonged to you, and you had a right to do as you liked with her, I should never have objected to the place at all. But pray do just as you like. I'm sure I don't want to be consulted in any way about it. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to

say that when he was taken from me I should never find any one again to consult my feelings as he had done. He was so beautifully obliging."

Dorothy Ann began to rattle the cups and saucers. She wished more and more every day of her life that a disposing Providence had spared Mr. Waldemar a little longer to his affectionate spouse, who, though she by no means appreciated him when living, seemed to look upon his removal as an act of the most unmitigated injustice.

"So sweetly obliging as he used to be," continued Mrs. Waldemar, putting her vinaigrette to her nose, "and never thought of doing anything unless it was perfectly agreeable to me. And would have laid down, I do believe, for me to have walked over him, if it would have soothed my feelings in the least after one of those

distressing attacks. And scarcely ever thought of such a thing as mentioning Meta in my presence, for fear I should think she was supplanting me in his affections. Poor dear man! he knew how sensitive I was, and how it would distress me if I thought he could care for anyone but myself. And I'm sure it would have been a terrible trial to him if he could but have known how I was to be left with her, and that tiresome old Miss Warrener dying just when she did, throwing the girl on my hands, and no provision made for her, except that little legacy, which is scarcely enough to keep her in clothes. And when she had brought her up, too, with such ridiculous notions about truthfulness and simplicity, and all that sort of rubbish. Why, if the girl had had a grain of common sense she might have been engaged to

young Charnock three months ago, and then this miserable concern would not have turned up."

"What miserable concern?" said Dorothy Ann, for she had never heard sister Walde-mar refer to Meta's health before as a "miserable concern." But just then Meta herself came in, and fortunately put a stop to any further remarks.

"Well, Meta!" said her aunt briskly, "what do you think we have been doing? You and I are going to Amberley Cove for three weeks. A breath of sea air always does my rheumatism good at this time of the year, and I don't think you will be any the worse of a change either. What do you say to it?"

"I don't care about it, Aunt Dorothy. I will go with you anywhere, where you like to go."

Miss Hacklebury sighed. This was such a different Meta to the Meta who came home nearly a year ago, so bright and cheerful, with such a ready smile, and such a quick light step, and such a happy freedom in all her ways. Miss Hacklebury remembered how, when she used to say to her in the summer time—

“Now, Meta, I think a bit of fresh air would do us good. Shall we go into the wood for an hour or two?” The girl’s face used to light up, and she would dance away to put on her hat, and come back in two minutes looking as fresh as a daisy. Blushing like a wild rose, too, for did not Stephen Garton often meet them in the wood, and were there any hours half so pleasant as those when they were together? All was so different now. There was no longer any spring in her life. It was just a weary putting off

of the time from day to day; a patient, hopeless waiting for the end.

Unless this visit to Amberley Cove should bring some sort of clearing up. Miss Hacklebury almost thought it would. She knew well enough that a single word of love from Stephen Garton would make all right again, and nothing but that. Sister Dorothy Ann was no sentimentalist; but though people laughed at them, she was sure there were such things as broken hearts. And she knew, too, that Meta's was one of those meek, gentle little hearts, which not having courage to rise above a hopeless love, will suffer and despair, and break. The suffering had come long ago. The despair seemed slowly gathering over her now. By and by the breaking would come too, and then all would be over.

Miss Hacklebury swallowed another heavy sigh, and rang the bell for Buttons to bring the muffins in.

CHAPTER XI.

THEY started for Amberley Cove the very next day, and by nightfall were settled in lodgings close upon the sea.

Not such lodgings as Mrs. Waldemar would have selected, had her opinion been taken. They were quite away from the fashionable part of the town, and anything but imposing, when, after threading your way through a number of narrow winding streets, you reached them. In fact, the house was nothing but a little cottage, primitive, old-fashioned, picturesque; just on the outskirts of the town, from which a hundred years ago, before Amberley Cove was sought after

as a watering-place, it had been separated by nearly a mile of country lanes and green fields. The rooms were low, uneven, oak-beamed, with odd little casement windows opening to what would in the summer time be a tolerably pretty garden, but which now in this February cold showed nothing but a few trembling snowdrops peering up above the black mould. Beyond the low garden wall was a patch of ragged cliff, and beyond that the grey, melancholy, restless sea, whose wail could be heard from morning to night as it beat upon the rocks a hundred feet below.

Not exactly a pleasant prospect for a person in low spirits, or indeed for any person who was dependent upon external influences for internal comfort. But the place was clean and airy and quiet, and the old lady to whom it belonged was a joined

member of Ebenezer chapel; had been so for more than thirty years, as she told Miss Hacklebury by way of reference. That was the principal reason why Dorothy Ann fixed upon the rooms. Because Ebenezer chapel was where Mr. Garton was to preach, and she thought Mrs. Groves would be able to tell her something about him, for the old lady was very chatty and conversable, and quite ready to say all she knew about the place and the people.

Amberley Cove was rather a stirring town in the summer season, but now it had the dreary, uncared-for look of most watering places during their winter torpidity. Half the houses appeared to be entirely closed; the other half looked desolate and untidy, the people who lived in them only trimming up their front rooms during the season for lodgers. Many of the shops were shut up,

to be re-opened in May, as bills on the shutters announced. There seemed to be nothing going forward in the town, no public amusements of any kind—not even a German band or a hurdy-gurdy to break the monotonous quiet of the streets. As for the sands, which in summer time presented such a lively, bustling scene, they were almost deserted now, save by a few children, who waded barefoot into the pools at low tide to search for crabs and starfish; and the sturdy-limbed, brown-faced fishermen, who used to sit under the cliffs mending their nets whilst their cobbles tacked about at anchor in the bay. The bathing-machines, whose gaily-painted roofs of blue and red and green had shone so brightly in the sun six months ago, were wheeled away into a great shed at the top of the cliffs; the pleasure-boats were stranded high and dry

on a reach of level sand above the pier, and covered with sheets of dirty tarpaulin. All looked dreary and desolate and unwakeful. Amberley Cove in winter time was no more like its summer self, than were the February beech-trees of Carriden-Regis village green, black, bare, leafless, untenanted by even a solitary rook or sparrow, like those same trees in the rich freshness of their June splendour, catching the sunlight on thousands of glistening leaves, whose sweet breath scented the air in the early morning, and in whose green shade a whole choir of thrushes and blackbirds sang their evening hymn before the sun went down.

“Oh! Aunt Dorothy, what a dreary place it is,” said Meta, as they disposed themselves in the faded, dingy little sitting-room, and she looked out over the square bit of garden with its patches of sickly snowdrops

and melancholy lilac crocuses, shut in by the low damp-stained stone wall; and saw beyond it the rugged cliffs and the deserted beach and the grey sea, over which a few black fishing-boats were tumbling aimlessly to and fro, and a flock of sea-gulls swooping round. "What a dreary place it is! I don't think your rheumatism will ever get well here."

"Never mind, child," said Aunt Hacklebury briskly; "we shall be all right by-and-by. A breath of sea air's the finest thing in the world for the health; wherever you get it; and maybe we shall find out before we go away that the people are better than the place."

Meta hoped they should. Neither, so far as she had seen them, were very promising at present.

After what Miss Hacklebury called a knife-

and-fork tea, and after settling Meta down on the big old-fashioned sofa to get a sleep after her long journey, she went into the kitchen, professedly to see after ordering dinner for next day, but in reality to draw out Mrs. Groves, the landlady, into a little conversation touching Ebenezer chapel and its present ministerial supply.

Mrs. Groves was quite willing to be drawn out. She was a chatty old lady, fond of talking about anything, but especially about the chapel, and the minister, and the general religious interests of the congregation. Having been a joined member for more than thirty years, she thought she knew as much as most people did about how things ought to be done at Ebenezer.

Her first remarks were not quite so inspiring as Miss Hacklebury could have hoped.

“Why, no, ma’am,” she replied, in answer to that lady’s inquiry as to whether the Amberley Cove chapel was well supplied with a good, talented, energetic minister. “I can’t say he’s by any means what me and the other experienced members of the congregation approves for godly simplicity and usefulness. He’s too much for grandeur and fine speaking, which them as hasn’t been high edicated can’t take in to profit thereby. And his Sunday morning expositions isn’t to our minds, as we’ve said, me and the old members, ever since he come to the place. You see, ma’am, he’ll take a portion as sounds straightforrad enough for sense when one reads it at home, and he goes round and round and round it, and takes it to pieces, and puts it together again wrong-side up, and up-side down, and end-side foremost, while you’ve clean forgot

what it was to start with; and then he'll tell you that it don't mean this, and it don't mean that, and it don't mean the other, but law, ma'am, he don't never tell you what it *do* mean, which isn't what me and the rest of the joined members thinks profitable for the edifying of the body. Now do you think, ma'am, that such expositions as them is profitable for the edifying of the body?"

Miss Hacklebury could not say that she thought they were, and she was rather grieved to hear that Stephen Garton had not developed a finer talent for pulpit usefulness. However, she would not judge hastily. Mrs. Groves might not be able to appreciate the loftier walks of intellect.

"And doesn't seek to benefit the poor, ma'am," continued the voluble landlady, "by going about among them to do 'em a bit

of good at this inclement season of the year, when they nat'rally look to get a bite and a sup from the minister now and then, which he would give them if he had a proper sense of his Christian responsibilities, instead of spending it on the best of cigars that can be got for love or money. And an awful screw in his rooms, ma'am, as the party who took him in to do for him told me with her own lips, that I mightn't be mistaken. I thought to have had him myself, a settled lodger for the winter, being a paying thing, and me as good a right to him as anyone, belonging to the congregation this thirty year and more. But the party as got him, through setting forth her apartments to better advantage, as I was over-truthful to do, for I never did go on to advertise them as elegant, being what they aren't, says I shouldn't have laid by

a sixpence with him, which isn't what people in our line thinks to meet with, though I'm sure I never was a person that looked for improper profits, especially from a minister, that if he's a good man brings a blessing to the house, same as Ebedodem got with the ark, a great deal more than the weekly rent of the apartments. And I told Mrs. Bletchley, ma'am, that's the party as has him, that it was a judgment on her for setting out her rooms as elegant, when there's not a bit more to look at for viewliness than this parlour that you've just took; and not half like it for comfort, for I will say that if my furniture's a bit old, for it's what my master and me bought with his savings out of the bank five and forty years ago, when we took to the place first married, it is as clean as clean can be, and has everything that's proper done to it

with furniture paste four times a year, and brushed every Friday when I cleans the apartments out, lodgers or no lodgers, being a person that always had a name for tidiness, which isn't what Mrs. Bletchley can say of herself, though, being a joined member, I wouldn't go against her letting her rooms reglar, as it might be if it got about that she wasn't as clean as some people."

Here Mrs. Groves' remarks came to a temporary lull, whilst she left the kitchen to put away the tea-things which she had been washing up, in a cupboard at the foot of the stairs.

"I'm sorry you're not better suited with a minister," said Miss Hacklebury, rather thoughtfully, when the old lady came back. "I was thinking of going to Ebenezer chapel myself, to-morrow."

"Oh! then you may go, ma'am, for it isn't

Mr. Tate that you'll hear, this month to come and more. The air didn't suit his constitution, or something, and the members has riz a sum for a young man to supply for him, while he goes somewhere to get hisself set up. And though I wouldn't go to say anything as isn't Christian against him, for I was always brought up reverent to them that had the rule over me, I shouldn't much matter if he stopped away a good bit. There was a prayer meeting for him, night before last, to ask for him to be raised up and speedily brought among us again, but there's me and a good many others wouldn't mind if it didn't meet with a remarkable quick response, 'specially if his affliction was blessed to his spiritle interests, as the members had a deal better have had a meeting to ask for that, than that the dispensation should have been took off entire; for our interests

has looked up wonderful since Mr. Garton comed among us."

"Oh, indeed!" and Miss Hacklebury brightened up. "Then it was not Mr. Garton you were telling me about, just now."

"I should rather think it wasn't, ma'am. Why, ma'am, he was no more like Mr. Garton, wasn't the tother one that's gone away, than this here place is like what it will be in the summer time, when the company gets started coming, and things begins to look alive a bit. Mr. Garton's real plain and straightforrad, and never says what a portion don't mean, but what it do mean, which is a deal more to the edifying of the body; and goes about among the poor, too, like an angel of mercy, as they're fit to call him, which is an expression which nobody, as I know of, felt drawn out to make use of to the late Mr. Tate, him that's gone away for his health."

“But I don’t go to say much, ma’am,” continued Mrs. Groves, “I don’t go to say much to the other members, because it might come round to his ears, and act permiscous on his spiritle interests. A new broom sweeps clean, ma’am, everybody knows that, though I don’t think he’s the sort as ’ll wear out so quick as a many; but still when I happen of him I don’t tell him what folks says about him, for fear of his being puffed up with spiritle pride. It’s a bad thing, is spiritle pride, ma’am, worst sort o’ pride as is; especially for young ministers, who ought to be kept low under a sense of their shortcomings, as we’ve all got our shortcomings to be kept low about. Gifts is dangerous, as my poor husband used to say when anyone endowed out of the common comed among us, and young ministers as has ’em ought to have a deal of plain words spoke to ’em

by the old members as has more experience."

And then Mrs. Groves went into a long discussion on the religious interests of the Ebenezer congregation, returning now and then to Stephen Garton, and patting him on the back, figuratively, with a word or two of judicious praise; cautioning Miss Hacklebury, however, not to say anything about it to the young man himself, if she *should* chance to meet him during her stay at Amberley Cove.

Miss Hacklebury promised, and then went back to Meta, who was lying on the sofa wishing for bed-time.

"I wish I could sleep all the time, Aunt Dorothy. It is so much better than waking."

"Nonsense, child," said Miss Hacklebury briskly. "Don't you go talking anything so ridiculous. You won't feel like the

same girl when you've been here a week. Just have patience, and some day you'll be so happy you won't want to go to sleep at all."

Though truly, to look at Meta's pale listless face, that time seemed very far away now.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS HACKLEBURY went to Ebenezer chapel next morning, leaving Meta behind in the dingy little parlour, because, as she said, she was not quite sure that the chapel would be properly ventilated. Places of worship in second-rate towns were not always very well ventilated, and in that case Meta would be sure to faint, which would make such a commotion in the congregation.

“So you just stop here quietly, Meta child, and read your Bible or something useful; and if the sermon happens to be particularly good, I’ll let you know when

I come back, and then perhaps we can both of us go, another Sunday."

"Very well, Aunt Dorothy. I don't care anything at all about it."

Miss Hacklebury kissed the pale, thin little face which looked so meek and patient.

"I don't think you care about anything, Meta, child."

"No, Aunt Dorothy. I don't think I do."

"Ah, well! We'll put a stop to that by-and-by. I'm not going to have you get into that sort of track, and all your life to be lived yet. Why, child, how do you think you're to get through the next fifty years if you start in that way? Read the twenty-third Psalm, Meta, honey, and try if you can raise a little bit of thankfulness before I come back."

And away Miss Hacklebury tramped to the Ebenezer chapel, half sad, half hopeful; wondering how things would turn out, after all.

She chose a seat which could not be seen from the pulpit, and then waited with a strange, almost trembling anxiety, the appearance of the minister.

He came, after what seemed to be an interminable time. Not quite the Stephen Garton that she remembered six months ago, hale, stout, fresh; a man who looked as if he could go through any amount of hard labour, and enjoy it too. This Stephen Garton was rather shrunken, and had an awkward stoop, the result, perhaps, of continual study and writing, though neither of these practices affected him at Carriden-Regis College. And in his face there was what Miss Hacklebury called rather a cross-grained

expression, such as people are apt to take on when they fancy themselves unkindly treated by the world; a look of bitterness and disappointment, which Mrs. Groves and other spiritually-minded members might attribute to inward exercises of an unusually severe character, a painful though wholesome sense of his own deficiencies and shortcomings, and a humble dissatisfaction with that state of Christian experience whereunto he had attained. Miss Hacklebury, however, was of opinion that the expression had grown out of internal exercises of quite a different nature. If she was not very much mistaken, sister Waldemar had had something to do with the lines on Stephen Garton's forehead, and the bitter, almost sarcastic look that came upon his face sometimes, and the tinge of quiet sadness which forced itself into his speech from time to time. His

was the look and bearing of a man who has suffered more wrong than he has done.

He preached a very good plain sermon. Apparently much to the satisfaction of Mrs. Groves, for she nodded her head approvingly several times during its course, and looked across to Miss Hacklebury, as much as to say,

“I told you so. You see the young man has gifts.”

But there was no exhibition of scholarship about what he said, no showing off of those “splendid and exceptional talents,” as the professors called them, which had gained him the Burton prize six months ago. It was a plain, simple, homely discourse, such as the poorest person in the congregation might understand, from the words,

“The common people heard him gladly.”

Miss Hacklebury watched her opportunity,

and met him at the chapel gates, as he was going home.

“Good morning, Mr. Garton.”

Stephen started.

“I beg your pardon. I think you are mistaken. I am a stranger here.”

“And so am I. Miss Hacklebury, of Carriden-Regis.”

“Good morning, Miss Hacklebury.”

And raising his hat to her, Stephen Garton crossed the road, and was out of sight in two minutes, leaving Miss Hacklebury at the chapel gates, with her good wishes and explanations unspoken.

“All right,” said Dorothy Ann to herself, with a smile on her honest, practical face. “We’ll make it all right by-and-by, Mr. Garton.”

But she was rather glad than otherwise that he had gone away from her in that un-

gracious fashion. It showed that the arrow was in the wound yet, stinging and smarting; and that was far better than if the wound had been healed over and forgotten. If Stephen had brightened up and said he was very glad to see her, and made a series of polite inquiries after the health and well-being of his friends at Carriden-Regis, and said how delighted he should be to call upon her during her stay in the place, she would have had far less hope of satisfactory explanation, than sprang up within her as she noted his almost angry start of recognition, and his flushed face and hasty step as he turned from her, and left her to her own meditations. The saddest thing of all was when people learned to forget, and he had not learned to forget yet. That was certain enough.

“Well, Aunt, was it a good sermon?”

"Yes, child, excellent. As good a sermon as anyone would wish to hear."

"Who was the preacher?"

Aunt Hacklebury twitched at her bonnet-strings, and got them into a knot.

"I can't tell you. Stranger; regular minister ill, or something of that sort."

"But didn't you ask his name? You said you couldn't bear to hear a minister without knowing his name."

"No, child, I didn't ask. It was an excellent discourse, though, and eminently practical. But you mustn't hinder me any more, or I shan't get my things off before dinner. Don't forget, now, to take your glassful of herb tonic before I come downstairs again; and did you get it in the middle of the morning, too?"

"Yes, Aunt, I think I spend all my time taking herb tonics now."

“You can’t take a better thing, child. They’re excellent for bracing the constitution, though they can’t be expected to do it all of a sudden. If you take them regular, and take the sea air regular, too, you won’t be like the same girl when we go back to Carriden-Regis.”

Next morning, first thing after breakfast, Dorothy Ann went down to the sands, thinking that most likely Stephen Garton would be taking his early walk there, as Mrs. Groves told her she had heard from his landlady that he always took a walk after breakfast, before he began studying ; and generally chose the beach, for the sake of the sea air.

He had chosen it this morning. Miss Hacklebury had not been striding along in the teeth of a brisk wind for many minutes, before she saw his tall figure looming in the

distance. His hands in his pockets, his shoulders bent forward, his eyes on the ground, he seemed to be taking no notice of anything or anybody. Indeed, at that early hour of the day, there was nobody to take any notice of, except Miss Hacklebury, and he did not even see her until she was within a few yards of him.

Then he did what was certainly a most uncourteous and unjustifiable thing. Whilst she was getting ready to speak to him, and had just reached out her hand for a friendly greeting, he turned sharply round, and walked away from her as quickly as he could.

It was very rude. Of course if Stephen Garton had been a gentleman born, he would have done nothing of the sort; if he had known half as much about etiquette, good breeding and manners, as Rodney Char-

nock, he would have raised his hat with a suitable blending of grace and dignity, and wished the lady good morning, and shaken hands with her, seeing she appeared to wish it, and then passed on, writing all manner of bitter things against her in his own heart. But Stephen Garton was not a gentleman. He was only a washerwoman's son, and he had been reminded of that fact pretty strongly more than once.

Miss Hacklebury was not going to be beaten in that way, though. She could walk as quickly as Stephen Garton when there was a need for it. Putting her best foot forward, she set off after him, and almost before he was aware of her pursuit, had laid her hand with a strong grip on his arm.

He made a movement as though he would shake it off, but she held fast to him, spite

of the black looks, and the rapid strides, and the averted face, which told plainly enough that he wanted no company of hers.

"Mr. Garton," she said, "I know you don't care to see me just now."

"No, I don't," he replied.

"Thank you; I like plain speaking. It was always more in my line than compliments, or anything of that sort. But what I want to tell you is this, Mr. Garton, and I don't mean to go away from Amberley Cove until I've got it told. I never knew, until three months ago, why you left Carriden-Regis without even coming to say good-bye to us, and Meta doesn't know it at all. She thinks you behaved in that way just because you got tired of us. I wanted to tell you this much, and you may make what you like of it."

Apparently Stephen did not know what

to make of it, for he stood there, grave, moody, defiant; no very promising look as yet upon his face.

Miss Hacklebury went on, still keeping fast hold of his arm, lest he should dart away from her before she had said all she wanted to say.

“I know what you thought yesterday, when I stopped you as you were coming out of the chapel gates. You thought after the way you had been treated by sister Waldemar—for I know all about the note now, Mr. Garton—that it was an insult for any of us even to speak to you again. And so it would have been, if I had joined in what she did then. But I didn't, Stephen Garton, and I honour and respect you just as I did from the very first, and it was a great wrong and injustice for sister Waldemar to treat you as she did.”

"No, I haven't done yet," she said, seeing that Stephen wanted to get away. "I want you to come and see us, I mean Meta and me, sister Waldemar isn't staying with us here."

"Meta!" said Stephen sharply. "Is Meta——?"

"Meta is staying here with me. She isn't so strong as she used to be, last summer, and I thought a breath of sea air would do her good. You can come and see us if you like, and if you don't like you needn't. I don't know that I can put it plainer than that."

"I'll come this afternoon," said Stephen Garton, pushing his cap down over his eyes, and wrenching his arm away from Miss Hacklebury's grasp. He had heard about as much as he could bear, just then.

Miss Hacklebury watched him for a mo-

ment or two, as he tore away across the sands; and then she set off home, feeling, as she expressed it afterwards, quite a different woman all over.

"Well, Meta," she said, when she came back into the faded little sitting-room. "How do *you* seem to feel?"

Meta was standing at the window, with her hands clasped at the back of her head. She had been standing there ever since Miss Hacklebury went away, looking out at the dreary bit of garden, and the damp wall, and the rugged cliff, and the restless sea, chafing and breaking on the rocks beneath.

"I feel just as I always do, Aunt Dorothy. You have been away a long time."

"A long time, child? Why, it isn't half an hour, if it's as much as that. I've only just been down to the sands and back again, and you don't call that long?"

"It seemed long to me. But the time always does seem now, as if it never would go on, and I can't feel any pleasure in anything."

"Oh! never mind, child. It's just the change of air that you haven't got accustomed to yet; you'll be better by-and-by."

"I don't care to be better, Aunt Dorothy. I begin to feel as if I didn't want to get better at all. I wish there was something really the matter with me, that I might die. Do people ever die without having anything very much the matter with them?"

"Hush! hush! child, what nonsense you are talking," said Aunt Hacklebury, sharply; but she only said it sharply because she was sure that if she said it in any other way she should break down, and make a simpleton of herself. Meta's look and voice were so utterly hopeless. "I tell you you'll

be fifty times better when you've had a breath of sea air. It is a wonderful thing, is the sea air, for a person that isn't very strong."

"It's wonderful for you, at any rate," said Meta, with a feeble attempt at a smile. "You look ever so much brighter since you came."

"Brighter? I should think I *do* look brighter." And Miss Hacklebury pulled up her shawl over her shoulders vigorously. "I'm not like the same woman that I was before I went on the sands this morning. I must have you out there to-morrow, only it's as well for you to keep the house a little bit just now, until you get accustomed to the air. I felt it strike through me from the very first, and send the rheumatism out through my finger ends, till there wasn't a bit left; just as I told you it would, before

ever we came to the place. And we're going to have a caller this afternoon, too. The minister is coming to see us."

"Oh! Aunt Dorothy; and I hoped we should be so quiet here. I thought we were coming here on purpose that we might be quiet."

"Such rubbish, child. I don't want to be buried alive, if you do. Why, what do you suppose I told you to bring that pretty black velvet dress of yours here for, if we were going to sit like a couple of nuns from morning to night, with never a soul to look in upon us? Of course it's the minister's duty to find out strangers, and pay attention to them, especially if they are not in very good health, as I daresay Mrs. Groves^{*} may have told him you are not, being a joined member of the congregation so long as she has been."

“ Well,” said Meta, listlessly, “ he may come, if he likes ; only I hope he won’t want to talk to me about piety and resignation, as Mr. Gilbertson does when he comes to see me at home.”

“ I daresay, Mr.—I daresay the minister won’t say anything to you that isn’t proper and wholesome for you to hear. People ought not to have dainty appetites about their spiritual food, as I said to sister Waldemar when she was so bent on going to the College chapel, eighteen months ago ; though I wasn’t sorry afterwards, as it brought about that friendship with the Governor and Mrs. Ellesley, which was so very pleasant for us all. I’m sure we couldn’t have been introduced to a nicer family.”

Meta turned her face away, and said almost angrily,

“ When did you say the man was coming ? ”

“The minister, Meta, my child. You must not speak of him in that disrespectful way, or you’ll have to be sorry for it afterwards. He’s coming this afternoon, some time before tea, I expect. And now, do go and make yourself look tidy before he comes. I declare you lie there on the sofa with your hands behind your head, until your hair looks such a sight as never was seen—and so beautiful as you might have it if you liked! I never saw anyone who could make their hair look prettier than you can, when you try. And that grey gown doesn’t suit you a bit—you look all dowdy and washed out together. Do, child, now, try and brighten yourself up a bit before the minister comes.”

Meta only gave a restless twitch which seemed to say,

“Ah! Aunt Dorothy, *do* let me alone.”

The homily produced the desired effect,

though. Meta disappeared during the course of the morning and turned up again just before dinner, in the black velvet dress, her light hair falling over her shoulders in smooth glossy curls. Round her throat and wrists she wore some fine Valenciennes lace which had belonged to her old aunt Warrener, and nestling amongst her curls was a snood of light blue ribbon, which seemed to bring out their golden tints into brighter contrast. Altogether she looked as nice as even Aunt Dorothy Ann could have desired; if only one could have brought back a little rose-bloom to those white cheeks, and if the little hands had not looked so pitifully thin and transparent. That velvet dress was the dress she wore when she first met Stephen Garton at Mrs. Ellesley's, and she had had the blue ribbon knotted in among her curls too, and that fine old

lace shading the delicate fairness of her throat. A very bonnie picture she looked that May evening, when he shook hands with her in Dr. Ellesley's library; and a bonnie picture she looked now, even though the glow of hope and health had passed away. Any one who loved her now, would love her for the beauty of the patient, loving soul within, and not for beauty of brightness and colour any more."

"There, child, you look fit to be seen now," said Aunt Dorothy, regarding her with wistful, motherly tenderness, of which, indeed, there was a plentiful store in her heart, though not much ever found its way into speech. "There, child, I declare you're almost pretty. It's wonderful the difference dress makes in a person. That black velvet sets you off famously; your complexion looks quite a different thing with it,

if only you hadn't lost so much of your colour; but we shall make all that right by-and-by, when you have got a breath or two of the sea air. And that bit of blue ribbon in your hair, just as if it had grown there. I always did say to sister Waldemar there never was a girl could make herself look nicer than you could, when you tried. I really think if I was a man I should fall in love with you."

Meta smiled. She had not quite given over, even yet, liking to know that there was something pleasant and loveable about her.

"It would be no use falling in love with me, Aunt Dorothy, for I should never marry you."

"What, not if I was a handsome young man, Meta, child, with a fine fortune and a good pedigree, and all the rest of it?"

"No, Aunt. Dorothy; the pedigree and the fortune wouldn't make a bit of difference. I shall never marry anyone."

"Go along, child. What nonsense you are talking!"

"I shall not, Aunt Dorothy. I don't want to marry anyone."

"Perhaps you don't; but when someone wants to marry *you*, you will change your mind, see if you don't. There isn't a great deal of you, though, to make you worth falling in love with, for I must say you're gone to skin and bone wonderfully of late."

Miss Hacklebury was not afraid of telling Meta she looked ill, now that the remedy was so near. She knew that the light would soon come back to those quiet blue eyes, and the roundness and the roses to those pale cheeks. She felt as if she should so

have liked to have told Meta all about everything, just now; to have put her arm round the girl's neck, and said to her,

“Meta, child, Stephen Garton is coming to see you this very afternoon.”

It had been almost more than she could manage, since her return from the sands, just after breakfast, to keep from breaking into some outward expression of the joy which was tossing and tumbling in her honest, tough old heart. But that would have spoilt all.

And then if anything *had* happened that Stephen could not come. So she went on talking as if nothing particular was coming to pass.

“You show like a different person altogether in that dress. I always did say it suited you better than anything, except those

white muslins which you used to wear last summer. I don't wonder it's a favourite with you."

"Yes," said Meta, "I like it very much. I shall never part with this dress."

"Nobody wants you to part with it, child; and I can tell you it won't part with you in a hurry, for there never was anything like velveteen for wear. It's wonderful how it does stand, if you get a real good one at the first. I used to wear them myself when I was a girl, and poor mother always said they were the cheapest thing we could get, though they were a consideration for expense. I'm sure I wonder sometimes now, how I could spend so much money over a gown. You see when people get to my time of life, it doesn't seem to make that difference to them what they wear."

But Aunt Dorothy Ann knew well

enough, all the time, why Meta meant never to part with that black velveteen dress.

And so the afternoon wore on, until there came a sharp, decided knock at the cottage door.

Miss Hacklebury jumped up as if she had been shot. Meta sat still enough in her easy-chair; nothing ever startled her now.

"There's the minister, Meta. I declare he's put me in such a flurry as never was. I'm just like my poor dear father; he always looked upon the visit of a minister, let him be a clergyman, or let him be what he might, as something out of the common way, because of the respect that ought to be paid to the position. Now, Meta, child, rouse up."

And Miss Hacklebury began to whisk about the room in a most unwonted state of excitement, greatly to Meta's surprise, who

could not understand why such a commotion should be made over the minister's visit.

"Rouse up, do, Meta, there's a good girl. Dear me! I *am* glad I told you about changing your dress, you do look so nice in that one. Yes, Mrs. Groves, show the gentleman in here, if it's the minister. Come in, sir. We're just by ourselves, same as we always are in an afternoon."

A moment more, and Stephen Garton and Meta Waldemar stood face to face. How they looked, or what they did, or what they said to each other, neither of them ever knew; any more than people coming out of a darkened room into the free, beautiful sunshine, can tell at first the shapes and forms and colours of things around them. But when Stephen turned round to pay

his respects to Miss Hacklebury, she was nowhere.

Just the very place where she ought to have been.

CHAPTER XIII.

SHE had slipped away to have a little private demonstration in her own room. When sister Dorothy Ann did go to the length of a demonstration, it was always gone through in private; and after it was over she used to mop her eyes vigorously with cold water, and tidy herself up again, and come downstairs, looking as if nothing whatever was the matter.

Just as she did on the present occasion, after half an hour's quiet crying. But instead of going into the little sitting-room, where Stephen Garton and Meta were having their mutual explanation, she turned

aside to the kitchen, under pretext of making a fresh preparation of herb tonics.

"They're an excellent thing for the constitution," she said, opening out the brown paper bags and sorting the different specimens of sticks, chips, leaves, and roots which they contained. "An excellent thing for the constitution—better than all the doctors' stuff that ever was sent out. I don't believe in doctors' stuff myself, and I don't believe the doctors do either, for all they make such a fuss about it; and so I always brew my own medicine, and then I know what I'm taking. It's everything, when you're not just the thing for health, to know what you're taking. So I've left the minister to have a little private conversation with my niece. I think a ministerial visit is best private, sometimes."

"Yes," said Mrs. Groves briskly, accepting

the position at once, both as regarded the herb tonic and the minister's visit, "and the best thing you could give to her, I daresay, if she isn't very strong, as she don't appear to be at the present, poor young thing! I don't misdoubt but a treatment of that kind of mixture will freshen her up wonderful, a deal better, as you say, than doctor's stuff. And he's an excellent person, is the minister. I've heard say, though I haven't seen him visit the afflicted myself, that he has a beautiful gift in consolation; and I'm sure I hope he'll exercise it in the present case. It's a good thing for young people when their speritle interests gets ministered to, along with temporal means, and it strikes me our Mr. Garton's the sort that can do it."

"He is," replied Miss Hacklebury emphatically; "he's a very excellent young man.

I've found out that he is an old friend of ours. He was at college close to the place where I live with my sister Waldemar. My sister Waldemar is a solicitor's widow, and she and I live together, and this is her daughter, as you may perhaps like to know something about the parties you take in to your rooms. And a very clever young man he was too, and very well thought of by all the professors, both for his talents and his proper behaviour."

"Dear, ma'am, you don't mean to say so? No sort of occasion in the least for knowing who you was, though, and the young lady; for having let lodgings as long as I've done, living here, me and my husband, ever since we was married better nor forty years ago, until he was took from me after a tedious affliction, a year last back-end, and letting the apartments as I've al-

ways done in the season and out of it too, when a party offered suitable, I kind of knows when people are the right sort to be trusted; and I knew you was respectable from the very first; and could have let the rent gone, and the milk, and the baker, and small things as goes down in the bill, without ever so much as a doubt of it all being right at the week's end. And if you ever *did* happen to want any trifle, ma'am, as you hadn't change for in your purse at the time, I could put it down in the bill, with every manner of confidence that you would make it all right. Which isn't what I've been able to do with everyone that's took the apartments. Why, ma'am, if it wasn't a shame to speak of such things, I could tell you of a party as I let that very sitting-room of yours to, a bit since."

And then Mrs. Groves, who had a fine gift for conversation, went into a long long story about some people who had once taken the lodgings, and pretended to be such a very steady, well-conducted family, and made such particular inquiries about the different places of worship, and professed such a relish for a gospel ministry, and never happened to have any loose change about them when the men came with milk, or fish, or vegetables, or eggs, or anything of that sort; and then, at the end of a fortnight, took a cab, and, on pretence of going out for a day of pleasure, never showed up any more."

"And such a bill as I had against them, ma'am, for things that I'd paid for out of my own pocket, to say nothing of the rent of the apartments, which I might have let over and over again, that being a re-

markable stirring season, if it hadn't been for them, the good-for-nothing rubbish! So that you see, it made me in a manner suspicious, ma'am, for a good bit after; but I've got to know people now, and it kind of fastens upon me when they're to be trusted, and I've never been took in since, and I don't reckon that I ever shall, again. Yes, ma'am, you shall have all the brown pots I can get you, with the greatest of pleasure, and boiling water as much as ever you want, as soon as the fire gets agate of burning a little bit better."

And Mrs. Groves bustled about the kitchen in search of brown jars for the herbs to be infused in, carrying on her remarks all the time with brisk volubility. It was not often she met with such a good listener as Miss Hacklebury.

"And to think, now, of your knowing all

about our new minister. Deary me, ma'am ! but how fortunate I didn't happen to say anything unprepossessing to his gifts and graces. Not that there's anything as I know of, to be said improper in that direction, for as much as me and the other members has seen of him, he's the excellentest young man ever put to a congregation, and I shouldn't mind how long the other minister's affliction was lengthened out agreeable to Providence, if it was only made a blessing to his speritle interests, and we could keep this one, being, as I said, a better setter forth of the truth ; because his ministrations is a deal more what me and a many others thinks is suitable to the desires of the renewed mind. It's a great thing, ma'am, to get a minister who knows how to build up the body in love."

Miss Hacklebury said there could not be a doubt about that. And she was very glad to

hear Mr. Garton did it so well.

“Yes, ma’am, he’s very profitable to attend upon. He don’t deal with nothing no more than what folks wants to keep ’em along in the right road. People may say what they like about high larning, and a fine pulpit talent, and about brilliant gifts as there’s a many now-a-days seems to think of nothing else; but so far as my experience goes, and being a joined member this good bit more than thirty years, I think I’ve a right to speak, the best thing to keep a congregation together as is worth the keeping, is to just tell them the plain truth, and teach them to order their lives agreeable to it; which is what he does, ma’am, to much more profit nor what we ever had a minister do it before. Mr. Tate was over much for speck’lations, which didn’t profit them as hadn’t a taste for that sort o’ thing. It

isn't speck'lations, ma'am, as helps unlearned folks to do their duty to God and their neighbour."

Miss Hacklebury, sorting out her roots and leaves into their respective earthen pipkins, said that speculation was a useless thing in religion. There was nothing she disliked so much as speculation, when a preacher was inclined to give you too much of it. Speculation was to practical teaching, she thought, like the foam on the top of a glass of porter to the porter itself. A little of it was very good, for it showed that the draught was new and fresh, but too much was a terribly baffling thing for anyone who wanted a real, good, thirst-quenching drink of what lay underneath.

Mrs. Groves thought that was the best way she had ever heard of putting the subject.

“Yes, ma’am, I could have said that same thing over and over again, if only I’d had the sense to shape it out like you. But as I’ve heard, the next best thing to being able to say a good thing oneself, is to be able to pick it up when somebody else says it for you. And that was just what our late minister, Mr. Tate, used to give us too much of,—the froth on the top of the porter. Why, ma’am, the sermons and sermons I’ve sat and heard him preach, to settle whether Job was a real man or whether he wasn’t, and to fix the numbers right in some of them there early books, as folks as must always be picking and snarling at something, says they’ve been wrong put. And to drive it into us that the blessed resurrection is an accomplished fact, which there isn’t nobody in the congregation that blasphemous they’d ever go to say it wasn’t.

And to tell us how we must set on and defend ourselves when folks say the Bible isn't true. Why law! ma'am, a man might talk the length of fifty sermons to *me*, afore he'd get me to believe such a ridiculous thing as that. When he'd said all he could say, I should just tell him it didn't make a bit of matter; for I feel, right down at the bottom of my heart, it *is* true, or it couldn't teach us so beautiful about the deep things of the speritle life; and so long as I can get a bit o' comfort out on it I mean to stick to every blessed word, let who will tell me about mistakes, and such like nonsense. And as for defending of it,—when God Almighty isn't able to take care on it Hisself, it will be time enough for such poor little minnikens as Mr. Tate and me to give Him a helping hand, and keep anything misfortunate from happening it. And it do seem to me, ma'am,

seeing we've took our religion just as them who knows better nor we do, gave it to us, all we want is to know how to shape our lives agreeable to it; and it's no more reason stuffing us with argyments when what we want is a bit o' good, plain gospel truth, nor it would be to give a farm lad a sword and shield, and tell him to go out an' do field work in them. What he wants is a hoe and a rake and a good stout pair o' boots; and not a grand sword, as he's a vast more likely to cut hisself with than anybody else."

"But still, you know, ma'am," continued Mrs. Groves, "not knowing you was anything personally drawn to Mr. Garton, I might have said something unprepossessing to his gifts and graces, which I'm sure I should have been very sorry for, you being a lodger and all respect due to you, as nobody has

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it to say against me that I don't pay proper respect to anyone who takes the apartments. Not that he isn't everything that the best of folks could wish him to be, but you know, ma'am, there *are* people who are never content if they can't find a thin place somewhere in a man's coat. And if there isn't one to start with, they'll rub and rub until they get one made. And when you've gotten a thin place in a man's coat, it isn't long afore it wears itself into a hole. I don't misdoubt but some of the members would have found something to say, even against Mr. Garton."

"Oh!" said Miss Hacklebury, "it wouldn't have made a bit of difference to me. I always settle in my own mind what I think about a man, and then people may say what they like—I stick to my own opinion. And I thought from the very first that Mr. Gar-

ton was a young man that was laid out to much usefulness in his day and generation, and it would take a great deal more than you could say to make me think anything else of him. And now, Mrs. Groves, if the kettle boils, I would thank you to pour me some water over these herbs."

Mrs. Groves did so, continuing her remarks at the same time.

"Well, ma'am, I'm sure I'm very glad he's made hisself such a good *character* where he's been before. It's everything, is the *character* a man gets when he's young. And I shall feel it proper to tell the members what you say, on account of making them more open to his ministrations, because you see, ma'am, we have had ministers come who seemed to do well, and then when they'd got started fair, something turned up about 'em as wasn't agreeable to their pro-

fession. And I don't doubt but what Mr. Garton 'll be listened to a deal profitabler when it's known among the rest of the members that he's well spoken of as regards his abilities by a person like yourself. You've a good scent for a useful ministry, ma'am."

"Yes," said Miss Hacklebury, "I can't sit comfortably under any other. But I hear Mr. Garton coming out, and I've scarcely had a word with him yet. You needn't trouble yourself, Mrs. Groves, I'll go and open the door for him, and if you'll be kind enough to set those jars away to cool, I'll skim the mixture and bottle it first thing to-morrow morning."

Miss Hacklebury bustled away, taking care to shut the kitchen door after her, and got into the little entry just as Stephen was ready to depart.

“Good afternoon, Mr. Garton. I’m sure we’ve been very happy to see you, though I hope you won’t think it any want of respect me not keeping you company all the time. Those herb mixtures don’t do unless you see to them yourself. You can come again if you like, and if you don’t like you needn’t to.”

Stephen only said,

“I shall come again very soon, Miss Hacklebury.”

And then, giving her hand a hearty shake, hurried away. Miss Hacklebury thought, by the look of his face, and the tremour of his voice, that he was only going off in such haste because if he had stayed to say anything more, he should have felt himself obliged, like sister Walde-mar, to break down. And it always put her out so to see a man break down. She could not

help feeling all the time that he must be so vexed with himself for doing it. She always said there was nothing she disliked so much as seeing a man break down.

“Well, Meta,” she began, cheerily enough, as she went into the parlour—one single quick glance into Meta’s face had told her that all was right there—“how do you seem to feel, now? Going to die right off, as you talked about this morning, or want to go to sleep all the time?”

Meta laughed, a real, bright, natural laugh. It did Miss Hacklebury a world of good to hear such music as that again.

“No, Aunt Dorothy Ann. I don’t think I want to die now at all.”

“Bless you, child! I knew it would come right somehow.”

And Dorothy Ann Hacklebury held Meta closely to her heart, that honest heart,

rough and ungainly as the coarse home-knit shawl which covered it, but as warm, and serviceable, and trusty too.

“I *knew* it would all come right, child. I saw from the very first that you and Stephen Garton were made for each other, and I was sure he would be brought round to find you again, somewhere.”

If Miss Hacklebury had had a thought for anyone except Meta and Stephen just then—but she had not—she might have remembered with a touch of sharp regretfulness, that if another had done for her thirty years ago what she had been doing for Meta now, her life need not have been so lonely.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF course Meta got well after that. She would have been very foolish if she had done anything else. The colour came back to her face, and the light to her eyes, and the old happy quickness to her step, and she began to look just the same as she used to look in those days when first Stephen Garton came to Percy Cottage; only that there was the warm glow of a tried and happy love in her heart now, a love which need no longer hide itself away, but could shine out over all her life to brighten and to complete it.

For Stephen did come again to the little

house by the sea-side very soon, and again; and yet again, until Mrs. Groves suspected that Miss Hacklebury had not told her quite all the truth when she said that they had known him a long time and respected him very much. She thought that the young lady, Miss Waldemar, who looked so very pale and ill when she first came to Amberley Cove, did a little more than respect him very much, else why had she brightened up so wonderfully ever since that afternoon when Mr. Garton came to pay his first ministerial visit, and Miss Hacklebury had left them to themselves in the best parlour, whilst she busied herself in brewing herb tonics? If it really *was* the herb tonics that had done the good, Mrs. Groves was free to confess that she had never heard of such tonics in all her life; they certainly were more like magic than anything else. She

should uncommonly like to have the recipe from Miss Hacklebury, how to make them, for she knew several young people who had gone off delicate, the same as Miss Waldemar seemed to have done, and whose mammas and aunts would give almost any money for something that would set them up again, as Miss Hacklebury's strengthening mixtures had set up that niece of hers.

By-and-by, when Meta was strong enough—and she soon was strong enough—to spend most of her time in the open air, there were long rambles on the sands, those quiet, deserted sands, where scarce a footprint, except their own, was to be seen from morning to night. Stephen and Meta used to poke about in the crystal-clear rock pools, fishing out marvellous specimens of seaweed, which they brought up for Aunt Dorothy's inspection. Aunt Dorothy always kept on

the dry part of the sands, where she marched up and down as deliberately as a sentinel on duty, giving a watchful, motherly look from time to time towards the young people, but wisely avoiding, partly, perhaps, from regard to rheumatism, and partly from a nice perception of the fitness of things, that wet, shingly part of the beach amongst the rocks and pools to which they always contrived to find their way. And sometimes they would stand hand in hand, just like a couple of children, within reach of the tide, running backwards as its white fringe of surf crept closer and closer to them, Meta shouting and clapping her hands for glee if it did overtake them sometimes, and oblige Stephen to lift her up and carry her away out of reach of it.

Then at night, when he had no preaching or visiting to attend to, he used to come

to the cottage, and whilst Aunt Hacklebury dozed over her knitting, or, with prudent forethought, remembered some herb mixture which had to be prepared for next day, he and Meta had such long quiet talks together, and pictured what life would be for both of them when he had finished his work in Germany, and had been ordained to a charge somewhere; but where, they were too happy then to think or care. It would all come right. They were quite sure of that, now.

Miss Hacklebury wrote to sister Waldemar, and told her all about what had happened; how Mr. Garton was supplying for an invalid minister at Amberley Cove, and how she had met with him, and asked him to come to the house, and that, in consequence, matters had been satisfactorily settled between him and Meta, who had become quite herself again, as bright and happy and cheerful

as ever. Indeed, Miss Hacklebury said she had been quite sure from the very first, that it was nothing but Stephen Garton having been behaved to in the way sister Waldemar had behaved to him, so causing him to leave the place without ever seeing Meta, or coming to any sort of understanding with her, which had brought about all her illness; and that if they had not happened to meet again, almost by accident as she might say, it might have been the death of the poor girl. So if sister Waldemar had any affection for her stepdaughter, she might be very thankful that Meta's steps had been directed to Amberley Cove just when they were, whilst Stephen Garton chanced to be in the same place, supplying for this invalid minister.

Miss Hacklebury, knowing her sister's intentions with regard to Meta and young

Charnock, was half afraid that she would go into hysterics when she heard of this unexpected turn of affairs, and would write there and then, commanding Meta's instant return home. Not that such a command would have made a bit of difference to sister Hacklebury. She did not care a straw for the men herself, as she always said, and was thankful she could get along as well without them as with them, and a great deal better, too; but still, young people were young people, and had their own little notions and preferences about some things, particularly the right to choose for themselves who they would live with all their lives; a choice which nobody had a right to meddle with, save for reasons which could never be brought up against Stephen. And when a couple of them really did love each other, as she firmly believed Mr. Gar-

ton and Meta did, with a love which could hold on through absence and misunderstanding and deceit, as theirs had done, it was a wrong and an injustice for anyone to come in between them; and therefore sister Waldemar might say what she liked and do what she liked, so long as she, Dorothy Ann Hacklebury, thought that Stephen Garton and Meta belonged to each other, she should take care that nothing parted them again, even though sister Waldemar went into hysterics fifty times a day over it.

But sister Waldemar did not go into hysterics over it. She was rather glad than otherwise, as things were now, that young Garton had come to the point, especially as Mr. Charnock, since his return from London, had been paying very marked attentions to a young lady who was staying with his sister; and, if report said truly, they were

as good as engaged to each other, so that Meta's chances in that direction were at an end. An ending for which she might thank her own folly; for if she had had half as much common sense and worldly prudence as Belle Charnock's young lady visitor, she might have been preparing her wedding outfit and making her farewell calls, instead of looking forward, as she would most likely have to look forward now, to months and perhaps years of waiting. However, it was an important thing that she should be disposed of somehow, and as no one else seemed likely, Mrs. Waldemar thought she might congratulate herself upon the turn which affairs had taken.

But of course it would not do to express anything like congratulation in reply to sister Dorothy Ann's communication. It would not do to allow the conduct of Meta's affairs, though that conduct so far had been toler-

ably successful, to be taken so completely out of her own hands without some show of resistance. She was quite willing that her step-daughter should enter into an engagement with Stephen Garton, provided no more eligible partner requested the honour of her hand; but in so far as the preliminaries of that engagement had been settled without skill or contrivance of her own, she felt bound to surround her sanction of it with a suitable margin of offended dignity.

Accordingly, when she wrote back to Miss Hacklebury, which was done in the course of a few days, she informed her that, as the young people appeared to have taken affairs completely into their own management, there was nothing left for her but to remain passive, and hope that all would be well. Things did sometimes turn out for the best, but not always, when maternal advice and

co-operation were so completely unsought as in the present instance. She could not help thinking that Dorothy Ann might have shown a little more regard for her sister's feelings. But she would not make any complaints. She had quite given over now expecting to be consulted in the family arrangements. Possibly she might be very weak and too easily wounded, but there *was* a slight degree of consideration due to her position as the head of the family, and she thought she might have been consulted as to whether it would be agreeable to her feelings for a fresh member to be introduced into that family. But it was of no consequence. Dorothy Ann need not think that it was of any consequence at all.

Only she hoped that as the young people had taken everything so entirely into their own hands, they would be kind enough not

to let the wedding take place without giving her a little notice. And perhaps also they would let her know where they were going to live, and what they intended to live upon. When she was a girl, she said, young people were more modest than to think of entering upon an engagement of that kind without asking the consent of their guardians; and she must say that she was slightly surprised that Meta, professing to have so much womanliness, and all that sort of thing, could have brought herself to accept Stephen Garton in such a bold, hasty manner, and almost, as she might say, to have thrown herself in his way, by going to a place where she was likely to meet him. However, she hoped the result would prove that they had not been mistaken in their choice.

Having thus, as she thought, judiciously

toned down any over-glowing satisfaction which Meta might feel on receiving the maternal sanction to her engagement, she finished her letter by saying that they were not on any account to hurry back to Percy Cottage. So long as they could make themselves happy without her, and they seemed quite able to do it, they might leave her to her loneliness. She had quite given over, as she said before, expecting to be treated with any sort of consideration by the members of her own family. Since poor dear Mr. Waldemar's death she had been content to be slighted and neglected; perhaps it was a judgment upon her for not being sufficiently alive to her mercies whilst a disposing Providence continued them to her.

So Aunt Hacklebury and Meta stayed at Amberley Cove until March, when Stephen Garton had to go back to Germany. He

came with them as far as Millsmany on their way home, and after visiting his mother, went on to the College for a day or two.

Mrs. Waldemar, thinking that perhaps it might be as well for the Doctor to discover for himself the fact of Meta's engagement, addressed a note to him, and another to Stephen, on the day of Mr. Garton's arrival at the College, inviting them both to come over and spend an evening at Percy Cottage. It would be a convenient way, she thought, of letting Dr. Ellesley see the state of the case, and convincing him that any lingering hopes which he might have entertained with regard to Meta were at an end. Until that purpose had been accomplished, it was not likely that he would turn his thoughts in any other direction.

It did not strike her that she owed any

apology to Stephen Garton for her behaviour to him six months ago. Neither had she pride enough to feel any sort of uncomfortableness at meeting him again after owning herself so completely mistaken as her last politely-worded note had proved her to be. Some people who have not sufficient honour to keep them from doing a mean action, have just so much conscience as makes them feel humbled when they are found out in it, and just so much sensitiveness as makes them shrink from encountering the person whom they have wronged. Mrs. Waldemar was comfortably destitute of honour, conscience, and sensitiveness. She could have met Stephen Garton with bland, smiling courtesy, knowing all the time that a premeditated insult, offered by her to him, had never been apologized for. Even the consciousness of his contempt, so long as

that contempt did not injure her own immediate interests, would not have given a touch of embarrassment to the graceful ease with which she was prepared to welcome him to Percy Cottage again, no longer as the washerwoman's son, but as the Governor's guest. When it served her own purposes well, she could bid him away as unfit to touch the hem of her respectability; when it served them better, she could bid him back again with as much smiling complacency as though not the shadow of a grievance had ever passed between them.

And yet Mrs. Waldemar prided herself upon being "quite the lady," and the good people of Carriden-Regis were, for the most part, willing to grant her the position she assumed.

Stephen Garton, however, declined the invitation to Percy Cottage; declined it with

perhaps a little of the spirit which might have animated Paul, when he returned that famous answer to the Governor, who sent to release him from his unlawful imprisonment. The Doctor declined it too, thinking, with his usual modest self-depreciation, that he had only been invited because it would appear rude to exclude him from the hospitality to which his guest was bidden. So that favourable opportunity of enlightening him as to Meta's matrimonial prospects passed over. And as Stephen Garton was too shy to speak of his own new-found happiness, or perhaps too proud, thinking that the Doctor might have heard of the disgraceful treatment which he had received from Mrs. Waldemar, he left the College without any of his friends there knowing the real purpose of his visit.

He returned to Germany with the under-

standing that he was to see Meta again in the early summer. After that, he was to study for another year abroad, and then settle down at home to his regular ministerial work. When that work was fairly entered upon, he and Meta were to be married.

CHAPTER XV.

MRS. WALDEMAR had not quite given up all hope of becoming the Governor's lady. The position would be more attainable, she thought, if, by some apparently accidental means, Dr. Ellesley could be made to understand the fact of Meta's engagement. She knew very well that any such gentle hints as propriety allowed her to drop, concerning her step-daughter's prospects, would be utterly lost upon a man like Dr. Ellesley, who was unable to receive a truth of that kind unless placed before his eyes without a rag of disguise about it. She had therefore caught very eagerly

at the idea of getting him to Percy Cottage in company with Mr. Garton, in order that the engagement might speak for itself, without any hinting of hers. Of course a sort of natural instinct would explain to him how matters stood, if Meta's blushing face, and shy conscious ways—really the girl had grown quite pretty since she came home from Amberley Cove—did not sufficiently enlighten him as to the state of her affections.

But Stephen had foiled her there. She had once thrust him out of her house, and now he refused to return to it. Mrs. Waldemar found that subtlety, like the boomerang, is a weapon that generally comes back to the hand that flings it, and comes back sometimes to smite and wound. If she could only have accomplished a meeting between the Governor, Stephen Garton, and

Meta, everything would have been explained. Dr. Ellesley would have been convinced that there was no hope for him; after which conviction he would, like a sensible man, have turned his affections into another channel. And towards whom would they have turned so naturally as herself, especially after the kind and confidential way in which she had behaved to him with respect to his proposal about Meta, and the courteous manner in which she had requested that he would not let that untoward little circumstance interfere with the friendly relations which had hitherto subsisted between them?

Indeed it had not done so. For, although he had only been to the cottage once since that eventful January afternoon, his absence was sufficiently accounted for by Mrs. Ellesley's rapidly failing health, which might

reasonably be supposed to cause such a dutiful son as the Doctor no small amount of anxiety; and taken in connection with his numerous College duties, to leave him but little time for the ordinary courtesies of friendship. Mrs. Waldemar did not think it was at all necessary to lay aside her expectations, even yet.

The winter wore itself away, until the days began to lengthen, and primroses and violets peeped out in the green lanes, and the cawing of rooks in the old elm-trees near Carriden-Regis church told that spring had come. And then, as the sun lingered longer and longer before tinging those brown Millsmany moors with evening purple, the hawthorn began to look whitely out upon the thorn bushes, and lilacs scented all the lanes, and laburnums showed like patches of gold amongst the light green of

the young year's leaves, and after the yellow daffodils, or lent lilies, as the country people called them, had faded away from the Millsmany marshes, all the sweet spring flowers came dancing forth by the burn-side, and under the hedgerows, and in the thickening corn-fields. And Dr. Ellesley, sitting alone by his library fire, for Mrs. Ellesley was too frail to keep him company there any longer, said to himself,

“A year ago to-night.”

For it was Easter Eve, and the bells of St. Wilfred's church were chiming faintly through the evening stillness, and he remembered that long quiet ride home from Millsmany, and the hope that had stolen into his heart then,—hope not gone yet,—when his early love, so long dead or laid to sleep, had begun to stir and tremble with warm sweet life again.

There was no anger, no bitterness in his thoughts, as memory brought back all that year in which the love of Meta Waldemar had slowly grown and strengthened within him. Loving her at first for her likeness to his lost Agnes, he had learned to love her now for herself; and he gave to her, as men like him do give to those who, young, fair, innocent, pure-hearted, bring back to them again their departed youth. He might be a little sadder, if possible, a little graver, since that afternoon when he came from Percy Cottage with Mrs. Waldemar's courteous refusal sounding so chilly in his ears. But that refusal had only put a little farther away from him the hope which yet it need not entirely extinguish. For no word of Meta's had parted them, no courteous refusal of hers had forced him to lay aside that pleasant dream in which she belonged to him, in which,

as it seemed to him, he had but to stretch forth his hand and take her to him for ever. If to wait months, or even years, was all that she required of him, he could wait, so only her love was given to him at last.

And while Dr. Ellesley was thinking such thoughts as these, Stephen Garton was working on in that German university, working on so brightly now, for the memory of Meta's smile, no longer a bitter memory, underlaid all his toil. The sweet consciousness of her love flowed like a hidden stream through his life, making it rich and fruitful of right noble endeavour. And Meta waited patiently, thinking not the days long until he came again, quietly glad for his remembrance of her; the joy which it gave blossoming forth, as all true joy should blossom forth, into numberless little daily acts of kindness and goodness. Her love to him helped him

to fulfil the one great purpose of his life now, to learn and to grow and to gather in stores of wisdom which he might one day teach to others. His love to her helped her to fulfil the purpose of *her* gentle woman's life, making that life rich in good works, plenteous in charity and sweet lovingkindness, a true blessing to herself and others.

And so the year rolled on, until it brought the merry summer time again, and the June wind breathed its warm breath through the Carriden-Regis wood; and as the wild roses came out one by one, they seemed to whisper to Meta, "Stephen is coming," and the little blue forget-me-nots, opening their blue eyes by the burn side, whispered, "Stephen is coming." And the nightingale singing its first song in the white thorn tree, whispered, "Stephen is coming." And at

last, as she wandered one sunny June afternoon through the wood, thinking pleasant thoughts of him, dreaming pleasant dreams of his return, there came a step behind her, and two hands were laid on her shoulders, and a warm kiss pressed upon her lips, said for itself,

“Stephen has come.”

He made her sit down beside him on on of the fallen trunks. Close at their feet was the little wimpling stream, to whose brink the fern and coltsfoot strayed, and over whose clear waters, as it wound along, the trees bent with cool leafy murmur, singing to it all the day and all the night their quiet lullaby. It was here Stephen and Meta used to come, a year ago, whilst Miss Hacklebury sat beside them with her knitting, making such exceedingly matter-of-fact, sensible remarks from time to

time upon the book, whatever it might be, which Stephen chanced to be reading. And if, as he finished some old legend of knightly courage and maiden truth, he ventured to look up into Meta's face, she turned it so quickly away, lest it should tell too much. They wanted no book now, but each other's eyes, and the story which they told need not any more be hidden. Very quickly, too quickly for both of them, that June afternoon was speeding away. They did not know how long they had been sitting there, close by the burn side, its broad flag-leaves and iris blossoms swaying towards them with every breath of wind, when Dr. Ellesley came in sight.

Meta would have started away, but Stephen kept her by him. He was not afraid now to claim the woman he loved, in the face of all the world.

“It is only Dr. Ellesley, Meta. Stay with me. I do not want you to go away for him.”

And so she stayed, a pretty maiden blush flitting across her face as Dr. Ellesley, grave, quiet, as was his wont, joined them in their cool resting-place. He had only seen her once or twice since she came back from Amberley Cove—seen her by chance as now; alone, or with Miss Hacklebury in some of the shady lanes about Carriden-Regis. He was too honourable to seek to win by stealth what he was not yet permitted to ask for openly. If a single word would have given him Meta's love he would not have spoken it, until that courteous refusal of Mrs. Waldemar's had been withdrawn. He would wait for his wife until he could take her at the hand of one whose right it seemed to give her. And yet it was hard not to see her sometimes. Her

face, as it had been lifted to him many a day in bright smiling greeting, flitted between him and the students as he gave those prelections to which they listened with such respectful attention; and as he sat by his fireside through the long lonely evenings, he used to picture her close by him, as he hoped someday she would be, his Agnes given back to him after all these years of waiting. And even the chance, unexpected sight of her left a trail of brightness in his memory for days. He felt such a quietude, too, in her presence. His love for her had none of passion's restless, throbbing uncertainty. It was rather a peaceful, natural re-awakening to a life from which no longer interval seemed to part him than that which lies between night and morning, to one who wakes from quiet sleep. And just as he took her hand now, in pleasant

friendly greeting, he hoped, when months or years, it scarcely mattered which, had passed away, to take it in that clasp which nothing but death should part.

Dr. Ellesley was not surprised to see Stephen Garton there. He knew he was intending to come to Millsmany in the early summer, as soon as the College session was over, to visit his mother. And it was likely enough that he should come over to Carriden-Regis, though, in consequence of Mrs. Ellesley's failing health, he could not just then be received as a guest by the Doctor. But he had one or two friends in the village, Mrs. Waldemar amongst them, Dr. Ellesley thought, and very possibly he was staying there, Carriden-Regis in the summer-time being a pleasanter place for rest and quiet than the great bustling, smoky town of Millsmany.

He paused as he passed, and then joined them, sitting by Meta's side on the fallen beech-tree trunk. Stephen, lying on the moss at her feet, amused himself by gathering the broad flag-leaves and plaiting them into bands, as he and the Millsmany school-boys used to do when they rambled into the Carriden marshes on Saturday afternoon holidays.

"You have chosen a pleasant spot to rest in," said the Doctor.

There was no under-meaning in his words. The remark did not imply that Stephen and Meta, lingering there through the sunny June afternoon, would find the time pass more rapidly than it would have passed for himself, had leisure given him leave to stay. Nor was there the faintest twinkle of amusement in his eye as he took his place beside the two young people, or anything either

in his look or manner to indicate that he felt conscious of having disturbed them. He thought they were but wiling away the time there, as he could so gladly have wiled it away himself, had no sadder duties called him home.

“Yes,” said Stephen, “it is a pleasant spot. I think a spirit in my feet always leads me here whenever I come into the wood. You know it was just here that I happened to see Miss Waldemar for the first time. It was one afternoon when Charnock had been *nagging* at me with some of those disagreeable speeches of his, and I felt as if I could fight everybody in the world, except my mother. I was a different man, though, when I came back again.”

“Yes,” replied the Doctor, simply. “I know he used to vex you very often. But this Carriden-Regis wood in summer-time is

enough to still any man's angry feelings, and make him calm again."

"It was not the beauty of the wood, though, which made me a different man, Dr. Ellesley."

"Was it not?" And the Doctor glanced mildly at Stephen, thinking that perhaps some rare and valuable train of thought, falling into his mind just then, had done more than even the green beauty of those long scented glades, with their wild-flower carpet, and garniture of moss and creeper, to check the bitter risings of pride or anger.

Stephen's eyes were fixed upon Meta, fixed upon her with a look which needed no words to tell of the love which glowed and trembled in it. Her face, flushed, downcast, was turned away, as Agnes had once turned hers—only once—from Fergus Ellesley.

The Governor understood. Then for the

first time he took into his heart the thought which turned its daylight into darkness.

For awhile they all sat there together in the beech-tree clearing, talking about indifferent things—the beauty of the wood, the richness of the wild-flowers, the splendour of the iris-blossoms whose golden glory seemed to make a sunshine round about them; Stephen's life in Germany, the changes which had taken place in the College, the students who had come and gone since he won that Burton Prize. At last the Doctor said,

“I—I think I will go now. Good-bye.”

He shook hands with them both, and took his way through the shady path which led to the College meadows. It was bright with many a sceptre of purple foxglove, snowed over with white wind-flowers, and the pale perfumed blossoms of the wood-ruff; and all around him as he trod it, the

birds were singing for joy of the merry summer time, and the crimson-winged butterflies flitted like living flowers amongst the fern and moss; but it led him only into that dark valley, through which, for human help or comfort, the man who travels it must needs travel alone.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN the late summer of that year, when the leaves were beginning to fall, dry and yellow, from the elm-trees in Carriden-Regis churchyard, Mrs. Ellesley fulfilled the expectations of so many of her dear friends, and slipped quietly away to a blissful eternity, in the eighty-first year of her age, leaving an admirable opening for somebody in that home for whose active superintendence, especially as regarded the dispensing of its hospitalities, she had so long been pronounced incompetent.

Her death, as everybody said, was not an event which called for any violent manifes-

tation of grief on the Doctor's part. He must have been looking forward to it for many months. Even if his extremely retiring and studious habits had prevented him from noticing the want of proper style and appearance which Mrs. Ellesley's infirmities, joined perhaps with a disposition as retiring as his own, necessitated in his establishment, still her rapidly failing health, since the spring of the year, must have convinced him that a change would take place before long. He could not expect that a life already protracted considerably beyond the usual span of human existence, could be spared to him much longer. Indeed, when Mrs. Ellesley's infirmities and sufferings for the last few months were taken into account, it seemed scarcely right to wish that they should be continued.

When the first sadness of her removal

had passed away, and when a suitable period of mourning and retirement had been allowed to elapse, everyone knew what would be the most natural course for him to adopt; a course which indeed he would have adopted long ago, had not a delicate consideration for his mother's feelings prevented him from supplanting her by a younger and more efficient conductor of his establishment. Nothing, they were sure, but filial consideration, carried in this instance perhaps a little too far, had kept him single for so many years, whilst occupying a position which of all others appeared to require the presence of a suitable lady to sustain and adorn it. The Doctor would marry again.

But the Doctor never did marry again.

Instead of coming out into society after a proper interval, as all his friends expect-

ed he would have done, he drew more and more away from it. He was very rarely seen now, even in those literary and scientific gatherings at Millsmany, where formerly he had taken such a prominent part; and when at rare intervals he made his appearance amongst the *savans* and grey-haired professors of some philosophical society, or gave his accustomed lectures at the Mechanics' Institute, as he had given them, once or twice a year, ever since the Institute had been formed, the people who listened to him used to remark how very much his age began to tell upon him; and the ladies, who had almost given up asking him to their little social entertainments, or seeking out suitable introductions for him, said,

“Dear me! He is quite the old man. Now don't you think that Dr. Ellesley

is beginning to look *quite* the old man?"

But then, as they added, to account for that fact, the past year must have been such a very trying year for him. Everyone knew how very beautiful was the affection which had always subsisted between the Doctor and his mother; how he had absolutely devoted himself to her for so many years, and poured out upon her, as they might say, all the love and attention which men of his age usually expend over their wives and families. It was quite natural that the loss should make a considerable impression upon him, just at first.

Then, too, his duties, always exceedingly onerous and responsible, had been unvaried this year by his usual vacation ramble. For as soon as the College session closed, Mrs. Ellesley's health had failed to such a degree that her removal might be expected at almost any

moment; and therefore her son, with a devotion as admirable as it was exceptional, had denied himself even needful recreation, and neglected his own health to give her that attention which no hired nurse could supply. His conduct had been most exemplary, but he was evidently feeling the reaction of such long-continued anxiety, in a depression of bodily vigour, which was rapidly changing him from the haleness of middle life into almost the feeble decrepitude of advanced age. It was really beautiful, they said, to witness such attachment and filial devotion; though pitiful in the extreme that they should produce any such effects.

But the Governor, though a little more bent and feeble than heretofore, held his place amongst the students with undiminished dignity. There was no failing from that grave, lofty self-control which for years

had been the secret of his influence over them, of their respect and reverence for him. Still with all the force of the old time, before any light had gone out of his own life, or any hope had been suddenly taken away from it, he directed their lives and formed their thoughts, and filled, from his rich and varied stores of learning, their ruder, uncultured minds. Above all, more by the continual, unconscious influence of his daily example than by any spoken words, he fixed in the hearts of those who lived around him, day by day, a faith in goodness and a respect for true religion, which might perhaps be of more use to them in after life than anything else which they learned at Carriden-Regis College.

Nay, it seemed to them that the years which had so quickly taken the light from his face and the vigour of strong manhood

from his bearing, had put into his heart a truer tenderness towards those who, unlike himself, could not always stand upright on the battle-field of spiritual strife, and come thence, if wounded, victorious still. There was more humanness in his teachings now. He was more quick to pity, more ready to forgive, those errors and weaknesses which before he had only treated with grave rebuke. They had always given him respect and reverence, but they had not always given him love. Now, a sense of something like common brotherhood, touching them through a strange, new gentleness in his voice and look, bound them to him in a love which cast out fear. Formerly he had stood apart from them, as one who only controlled by the spotlessness of his own life. The light that shone from him shone to direct, never to warm and inspire. Now, there

came into it that touch of sympathy which made it as the summer sunshine, life-giving, life-preserving. And whereas in days gone by he had stood far off from them, beckoning them to a standard which yet they scarcely hoped to reach, he came and stood amongst them now a man like themselves, and gathering them round him, led them, hand in hand with himself, whither they should go.

But none of those who marked it knew why this change had come over him. Nor, as people praised his wise and gentle life, and said how fitting it was that age should broaden instead of narrowing his feelings, did they think through what dark valley of disappointment and loneliness he had passed to learn that wisdom, and out of what sufferings his gentleness had grown.

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. ELLESLEY had been dead for nearly two years. The gossips had given over talking of any "change" that might possibly take place in the Governor's private establishment. Even Mrs. Waldemar had discontinued her attendance at the college chapel, that being the only means, since Mrs. Ellesley's death, of keeping up any fibre of intimacy with the Doctor; and of late had thrown out her fascinations in the direction of Mr. Gilbertson, who had been providentially deprived of his better half about the same time that the Doctor's mother took her departure for another world.

People began to talk about the Governor

of Carriden-Regis College as "old Dr. Ellesley." When the ladies had ceased to busy themselves in selecting a bride for him, the Professors took him in hand, and speculated upon his probable successor. They said one to another that he would doubtless send in his resignation before very long. The duties of the Governorship were almost too heavy for him. He ought now to be able to devote himself entirely to literary pursuits, or else to enjoy that freedom from mental labour of any kind, which was the least a man could expect after so many years of close application to study. Besides, a younger man would be more suited to the position now. At any rate, a man of more energy and push. Dr. Ellesley's years did not incapacitate him for the Governorship so much as his inveterate shyness, and that passion for retirement which was fast turn-

ing him into a complete recluse. Someone ought to be solicited to assume the responsibilities of office who would discharge them with more vigour and determination, who would make his home the centre of a brilliant literary and scientific circle, and so give a distinction to the College, which, in Dr. Ellesley's time, it was never likely to attain. Of course, so far as his influence over the students went, he was everything that could be wished. Advancing years only increased and mellowed that. He seemed to draw them to himself more than ever, and to win from them even greater reverence than had been given him when first he came to the place; but still it could not be gained nor resisted that a younger, more pushing and energetic man would advance the interests of the College; and by assuming such a position in general society as Dr.

Ellesley had never even cared to take when it was within his reach, would cause both himself and his fellow Professors to be more looked up to and respected by the cultivated society of the neighbourhood. So said the various dons and doctors, each of whom hoped that in the event of the present Governor's resignation, he might himself have a favourable chance of promotion.

Sometimes in his solitary walks Dr. Ellesley used to see Meta Waldemar; or, sauntering, as he often did now, through the Carri-den-Regis wood, he found her and Miss Hacklebury sitting with their work in the beech-tree clearing. Where, with his usual grave, quiet manner, he would join them for a few minutes, and after listening to sister Dorothy Ann's remarks upon the weather and the appearance of the crops, say,

“I—I think I will be going now.”

And then he used to hold Meta's hand in his a long time—in such a kind, fatherly way, as Miss Hacklebury thought. It was quite delightful, she said, to see how kind and fatherly he had been with Meta ever since he got to know about her engagement to Stephen Garton. But it was very natural he should be so; of course, as he took such an interest in young Garton, and had known him so long, and seemed to have such a very high opinion of him, he could not help extending a little of the same interest to anyone who was likely to be so closely connected with him. If, as poor old Mrs. Ellesley said, the Doctor looked upon Stephen as a son, he would naturally look upon Meta as a daughter; and the more so since even independent of her connection with the young student, Dr. Ellesley had always taken very kindly to her, and made

quite a pet of her. Poor old Mrs. Ellesley used to say she had never seen the Doctor take more kindly to anyone than he did to Meta; he appeared to enjoy her visit to them that autumn when she was in delicate health so much.

But as Miss Hacklebury watched him down the long glade which led back to the College, she noticed how feeble his step had become, and he would stand quite still sometimes for a minute or two, as though some train of thought had suddenly come into his mind. Then slowly, and as if scarcely knowing whither he went, he would ramble on again, his hands clasped behind him, his head bent. He was such a very abstracted man, Miss Hacklebury said, was Dr. Ellesley; the most abstracted man she had ever seen, except their poor clergyman at Poplarcroft, who had been dead so many years.

But one sunny July morning, when the students were dispersed—the Doctor had never been for a vacation tour since his mother's death, he seemed as if he did not care to stir from Carriden-Regis—he strolled down to the village, and went into the churchyard, always a pleasant spot in summer time for loiterers. Indeed people who had travelled far and seen much of English rural beauty, always said they had never found a prettier spot than Carriden-Regis churchyard. It was bounded on one side by the ivy-covered gables of the Rectory, on the other by the neatly-kept garden of Percy Cottage, from which only a narrow grassy lane, rich with violets and primroses, separated it; and behind the church it sloped down to the brook, beyond which lay the valley of Carriden-Regis, the fairest valley in all the country round.

Just now the lime trees were in blossom, scenting the air almost like an orange grove; and the flowers, roses, jessamine and lily, which loving hands tended on many a rustic grave, made the place seem more like a garden for sweet thoughts and meditation, than a place for gloomy remembrance. And surely the flowers had never bloomed so brightly before as they bloomed this July morning; nor had the lime trees breathed so sweet a breath, nor the blackbirds sung so loudly in the white-thorn bushes down by the brookside, nor the sunlight poured with such a warm golden glow upon the old grey church, under whose shadow, for ages and centuries past, the village people had laid their dead to rest.

There was no one about, except the sexton's wife, Jane Gubston, a very garrulous old woman who acted as pew-opener. She

did not know Dr. Ellesley. He very rarely came into the village, and never on Sundays, when she was likely to be about in the churchyard. However, something in his manner betokened the gentleman, as she thought. She could even fancy, from his double-breasted waistcoat, and the clerical walking-stick which he carried, that he belonged to the body ecclesiastic, a body which Jane Gubston delighted to honour. A stray clergyman, most likely, from some distant parish, come to rusticate for a while in Carriden-Regis valley, as stray clergymen often did come to rusticate, when their means did not allow them the luxury of a continental tour. Mrs. Gubston had earned many a half-crown in her time from gentlemen of that sort, by showing them the "moniments" in St. Wilfred's church, which were considered to be very interesting, of their kind.

“Good morning, sir,” she said, dropping him a low curtsy as he paused at the church porch, where she was arranging some notices on one of the black boards. “The churchyard’s looking viewly this morning, sir. It’s as pretty a one, I reckon, as you’ll find in this part of the country. We think a deal of our churchyard, does us Carriden-Regis people. You see, sir, the mould’s good for flowers in a place like this. Law! a bit o’ richness underground helps ’em on wonderful. There’s no such flowers nowheres as me and my husband raises in this ere place. And if you was to see it in spring, sir, when the snowdrops and crocuses is agate, you’d say you never set eyes on anything like ’em for beauty.”

Dr. Ellesley, leaning meditatively against one of the gravestones, said that he could quite believe the churchyard must

look very beautiful in the spring time.

“Ay, sir, that it do. And we reckon the church a bit viewly inside. It was done up three years ago last back-end, with a architect from London, as put up all the bits o’ carving and that sort, same as they used to be when the place was first built, though how anybody can tell what they used to be then, is more than me and my husband can make out, and them all mashed and broken up as they have been ever since he took to the place, five and twenty years ago, and I never heard tell of anyone as could rec’lect them when they was proper, it being a rare place for antiquity, this here church. But folks in London knows a vast, sir. They knows a vast more nor what other folks does. You might perhaps happen to be from London yourself, sir.”

And Jane Gubston eyed the Doctor curi-

ously from under the poke of her black bonnet. Having lived in the place so long, she naturally liked to know who every visitor was, and where he came from.

The Doctor told her that he did not come from London, but he told her no more than that. It was as well, perhaps, that he refrained from revealing the fact of his governorship at the neighbouring dissenting college; for Jane Gubston quite saw eye to eye with Mr. Gilbertson in respect of dissent. She always said she "couldn't abear dissenters nor nought o' that sort;" and indeed she thought scorn to take in washing, or go out to do a day's charring, which was her usual avocation, for any but orthodox church people. Dissent was such a second-rate thing to Mrs. Gubston.

"Oh! sir," she said with a rather unsatisfied look, "nearer hand, maybe."

"Yes," said the Doctor, "I am not far from home here."

"Aren't you, sir? Millsmany, maybe. We get a good many quality folk from Millsmany out here in the summer time. There's a vast on 'em likes to come here when the flowers and things is agate, better nor them there furrin parts as it costs so much to go to. And a deal sensibler too. I never went to no furrin parts myself, but I reckon this here couldn't be beat for viewliness."

Dr. Ellesley said he did not suppose it could either. It was indeed a very quiet, pretty spot, and reflected great credit, he added, upon the people who had the charge of it. That last remark pleased Mrs. Gubston very much, and deepened in her mind the conviction that he must be one of the "quality clergymen" from Millsmany.

"I'd be quite agreeable," she continued,

“to go round with you, after the church is at liberty, and show you the moniments, as we’ve got a fairish lot of ’em inside, to the old families as belongs the place; but there’s a wedding agate just now—hadn’t gone in a minute or two afore you comed, and being up at the top end where the moniments is, it don’t do to disturb ’em. I reckon they won’t be long, though, now, afore they’re out.”

“Thank you,” said the Doctor courteously. “I—I don’t think I will trouble you to show me the inside of the church. I prefer remaining here, there is such a pleasant prospect over the valley.”

“Yes, sir, there is,” replied Mrs. Gubston, who seemed to think the prospect as creditable to her own and her husband’s care as the orderly state of the churchyard. “You won’t see a better nowhere, and I will say

that for it, and a deal more to set store by than them rubbishing old stones as nobody can read what's writ upon 'em. But it's accordin' to taste; some folks likes 'em and some doesn't. There was a gentleman from Millsmany give me a two shilling piece nob-but day afore yesterday, for showin' of 'em to him; but I'd just as soon have had it for showin' the flowers and the prospeck, which is a deal beautifuller. And then, sir, if you don't mind standing a bit longer, you'll see the wedding come out. Not as it's anything much for the like of you to see, sir, being as I don't misdoubt you are, of the bettermost sort, and this is as small a concern as ever I set eyes on, to say it was a respectable party. But you know, sir, a wedding's allers interesting. Though I've seed so many I never get's tired of 'em, whether they're big or little."

“A village wedding, I suppose,” said the Doctor.

Mrs. Gubston drew herself up with a little importance.

“Yes, sir; we don’t have no weddings here but what belongs to the place. It’s Miss Waldemar from over yonder,” and Mrs. Gubston nodded her head in the direction of Percy Cottage, “as is being married this morning. Awful quiet it is; nobbut two or three couple altogether, and never a carriage nor nought o’ that sort, wi’ living so near hand the church. But I will say this for her, that she’s as bonnie a bride as ever the sun shone on, and well worth for you to stop and look at as she comes out.”

“If only she hadn’t married a dissenter, sir,” continued Mrs. Gubston, regretfully, “which there wasn’t a bit of need for her to do, and church gentlemen as many as I

could count on my two hands ready to kiss the ground after her as she went along. That's why me and my husband hasn't put on our best things for to go into church and stand about and show respect to 'em. I can't abear dissenters, and me and my husband never goes to put ourselves about for 'em as we do for parties as belongs to the church. Mr. Gilbertson don't like 'em neither, and me and my husband always puts in to like and dislike same as he does, because it stands to reason he knows what's what better nor we do.

“And what she should have done such a thing as that for, is more than I can tell, and thought of as she was by high and low in this here village. I don't know what it was about her, some folks has it and some hasn't, but she'd that way with her, had Miss Waldemar, you couldn't help loving her.

Law! you never heard so much as a breath again her, which was a deal more nor what you could say for her ma; and then to think of her going and taking up with one of them dissenters, and not a scrap of breeding about him neither, if folks says true. Riz with his merits, an' that sort o' thing; merits is a good thing to be riz with, but——”

And Mrs. Gubston jerked the Doctor facetiously with her elbow; she was beginning to feel quite at home with him now, he was such a patient, ready listener.

“A bit o' money and a bit o' breeding is a deal better, as things goes now-a-days. Not but what he's a viewly young man, I will say that for him, as viewly a young man as ever I seed, nobbut he didn't belong to them dissenters; and has that sort of way about him as you might think he's a vast better nor what he is. And law! sir,

they do say that for intelleck he passes everything, but I don't believe *that*. It don't stand to reason for dissenters to have as much intelleck as our folks. I never goes near hand 'em myself, Mr. Gilbertson wouldn't like it, and it's me and my husband's look out to keep straight with him, 'cause it's as much as our place is worth to go again him; but I've seed them as has been to hear the preacher at yon College, and they say he don't never put out nothing as the poorest among 'em can't take in. It were my son's wife as went to hear him, though I don't go to mention it nowheres in a general way, by account of Mr. Gilbertson feeling hisself behaved improper to, if he got to know as the family encouraged aught of that sort, but I said to my husband as soon as ever my son's wife telled me that there about the dissenting preacher, David, says I, what's the use o'

going to hear a man as don't never say nothin' you can't understand? Why, law! sir, I never think a sermon's anything for intelleck if I can take it all in without a bit o' trouble. I like summut as goes over my head, in a manner. Mr. Gilbertson's the man for intelleck, sir. I defy anybody to tell where he's goin' to when he gets agate, and I've sat and listened to him; why, sir, the times and times I've sat and listened to him—let alone a bit o' sleep now and then, for you see, sir, being hard at it all the week, I just gets a nod sometimes when things is handy for it—and I've never known no more than nothing what he's been agate upon, only it was wonderful grand, and such beautiful words for length, law! sir, the beautiful words he does use. And that's what I call intelleck, summut as you can't get a grip on to know what it means.

"But I must be going now, sir, unless you'd like me to show you round among the graves, as there's some of the visitors does. I showed that gentleman round as come day afore yesterday and behaved so handsome, and he was wonderful pleased; thought them and the flowers and all the rest was fully ekal to the moniments inside, and slipped the two-shilling piece into my hand with the greatest of satisfaction, the prospeck and everything else being so beautiful, as I don't misdoubt but you've as good an eye for a prospeck as anyone, and you belonging to the quality, as I can always tell the quality when I sees 'em."

Dr. Ellesley gave the woman half-a-crown, and dropping a low curtsey, and smoothing down her black bombazine gown, she bustled into the church, to be ready for a second *douceur* as the bridal party left the vestry.

The nonconformist five-shilling pieces were quite as valuable as any others, and went as far in buying tea and snuff, though not received with quite such a dutiful obeisance as those which the orthodox members of the Establishment dropped into her hand from time to time.

A few minutes after, Stephen Garton and his bride came out; he, proud, happy, exultant, with head uplifted and firm step, as though, according to Mrs. Gubston's statement, he "belonged to a deal better sort nor what folks said he did"—she, like a little bit of white cloud by his side; all white, only a touch of jessamine flower here and there upon her dress, and a gleam of golden hair shading the rosy downcast face under the veil.

It was indeed a very quiet wedding; no prancing horses with satin rosetted outriders,

reined in at the gates, no rows of children to scatter flowers, no fluttering array of bridesmaids in mist of lace and muslin, laughing and blushing with their attendant squires. Stephen and Meta came out alone, and crossed the grassy lane into Percy Cottage garden, he looking too high, she too low, to see Dr. Ellesley as he stood there under the lime trees, with his hands folded behind him, a musing, abstracted look upon his face. After them, at a little distance, came a bridesmaid and groomsman, and then Miss Hacklebury, with an old gentleman who had most likely given the bride away.

That was the entire wedding procession. After it had passed, the sexton came out and locked the church doors, and then with his wife, set off home, she making a very low curtsy as she passed the Doctor.

“Because, David, he behaved rare and hand-

some, and gived me a half-crown piece for nothing no more than showing him round among the flowers and things, as he seemed to think they was wonderful for beauty. But law, David! such a quiet man. I never see'd a quieter in all *my* born days."

CHAPTER XVIII.

IF you were to pay a visit to the old-fashioned village of Carriden-Regis now, nearly ten years having passed away since Dr. Ellesley brought Meta to it, you would find but little change in the place.

Passing the stone bridge, so richly tinted with moss and lichen, which forms the boundary of St. Wilfred's parish, you would come to the raised footpath, along which the Governor and his young lady companion took their way to Percy Cottage, after sundry previous halts and interruptions. It would lead you, after following it for a hundred

yards or so, to a couple of very old cottages, black-timbered, latticed windowed, picturesque, tumble-down places, with colonies of sparrows under the eaves, and a whole garden of houseleek and wallflower and red pimpernel blossoming upon the thatch. After these, you reach the village proper, which still wears its accustomed aspect of mouldy, venerable decay. The old men cluster, on summer evenings, under the beech trees on the green, talking over parish gossip, election of churchwardens, appointment of parish officers, beadles, constables, and the like. The women loiter at their cottage doors, also talking gossip, though of a different kind, theirs relating chiefly to births, marriages and deaths, domestic quarrels, house-keeping, children's ailments, and other topics which form their province, as village politics form that of the men.

In the one long street of the village the children play as heretofore, at marbles, peg-top or battledore; always, however, keeping at a respectful distance from the great houses, the Hall, Manor, Rectory, and the Steward's and Doctor's residences; knowing full well that any shouting or brawling in such sacred vicinity, will bring down on them and their peg-tops the summary justice of the parish constable, whose office depends upon a due regard to the comfort of the village aristocracy.

If you cross the green, from Mrs. Danesborough's house, and knock at the door of Percy Cottage, it will be opened for you—not by Buttons, for Buttons has been married more than six years to the grocer's young man, and rejoices now in a brood of little Buttonses, broad-faced, sturdy-limbed as her-

self—but by Joanna, staid, reticent, penetrative, knowing a great deal more than she talks about, and well-acquainted as ever with the cunningness of some people. She will show you into the drawing-room, where a lady still very elegant and graceful in all her movements, though no longer rejoicing in unstreaked raven ringlets, and obliged to supplement the deficiencies of her complexion by a vigorous use of cosmetics, will rise to receive you with a sweet smile and all the affectionate impulsiveness of old.

“So *glad* to see you, so *very* glad! And so *exceedingly* kind of you to come! I can’t *tell* you how delighted I am. But *do* excuse me,” and here the vinaigrette is produced. “You know you did give me such a shock, you were the very *last* person in the *world* that I expected to see; and I

daresay you remember that my nerves are so *easily* startled. I am so foolish. Poor dear Mr. Waldemar used to say," &c., &c.

You can imagine the rest.

Mrs. Waldemar, for she is Mrs. Waldemar still, and likely to remain so, is not altered at all, except in outward appearance. Elegant, guileful, selfish, scheming as ever, "a cunning sort," as the discriminative Joanna says, "and mostly knows a vast more nor what folks might think she do."

Leaving Percy Cottage by that little garden gate, through which Stephen Garton and his bride entered it, you will cross the grassed lane to the churchyard, where the lime trees blossom still, and the blackbirds pipe in the thorn-bushes down by the Carriden brook, and the roses cluster thick as ever round the gravestones, dropping year by year their crimson tears on the quiet

sleepers beneath. One of these gravestones, quite a new one, for the letters upon it are yet sharp and fresh, unstained by a single winter's damp, bears the name of Dorothy Ann Hacklebury, eldest daughter of the late Phineas Hacklebury, of Poplarcroft, near London.

Miss Hacklebury died of rheumatic fever. Stephen Garton's wife waited upon her during all her long illness, because Sister Waldemar's nerves were not equal to anything of that sort. "So distressed, you know, at the sight of pain. It always does upset me so," as the solicitor's widow said, when she wrote for darling Meta to come over directly and attend upon her poor aunt, who was suffering so cruelly.

When Miss Hacklebury knew that all would soon be over—that her days of visiting and herb-tonic making, and vigorous, well-inten-

tioned scolding were at an end, she asked Meta to bring her writing-desk, and took out of it a packet of yellow, faded letters, which she requested should be put into her coffin and buried with her. Then kissing Stephen Garton's wife, she said,

“I am glad I have lived to see you happy, Meta.”

And so died good, tender, though rough-hearted Dorothy Ann Hacklebury, and passed away to a sweeter joy than earth had ever given her.

Leaving that grave, you may strike across the village-green, past the Hall and Manor-house, to the upper end of Carriden-Regis wood, and through the tangled glades of hazel and sweet-brier to that beech-tree clearing where Stephen Garton and Meta Waldemar met, one sunny May afternoon, nearly ten years ago. The brook murmurs

its quiet tune among the flagleaves and forget-me-nots still, the dove complains from the larch trees' thickest covert; in June evenings the nightingales sing as sweetly as ever, whilst lovers walk hand in hand to listen. The only change in Carriden-Regis wood is from beauty to beauty.

And then, following the path past the old willow-stump, where the valley-lilies grow so thickly in early summer, you come out into the meadows, over which a flagged path leads to Carriden-Regis College. It looks handsomer than ever, now that the trees have grown up round it, and those high red brick gables and turrets, which did seem a little too conspicuous ten years ago, have been toned down by damp and rain and Millsmany smoke into a somewhat graver tint. Indeed, even Mr. Gilbertson himself acknowledges in private that the building is

rather an ornament than otherwise to the surrounding landscape.

Stephen Garton is one of the Professors at the College now. A rising man, a very rising man, as the other Professors say. They would not at all wonder if he should be made Governor some day, in twenty years time, maybe. But very quiet. Not at all the sort of person to shine in general society; want of readiness in speech, retiring disposition, &c., which, as they say, is often the case with very clever men. He writes well, though, and preaches well, too, and is a creditable representative of his own section of the church in those Millsmany meetings where Mr. Gilbertson reaches out such a brotherly hand to his fellow Christians of all denominations.

On Sunday mornings you may, if you are so disposed, perform your religious devotions

in the College chapel, that very comfortably appointed place of worship into which Mrs. Waldemar used to float with such swan-like elegance and grace ten years ago, the admiration of the pew-opener, the envy of the less swan-like dissenting fashionables. And at the upper end near the pulpit, in one of the pews set apart for the College people, you will see a gentle, pleasant-looking lady, in half-mourning.

The half-mourning is for Aunt Dorothy Ann, who has not been dead more than six months. You cannot help knowing that face again, though a little—only a very little—of its girlish fairness is passed away. You will recognize it as the same into which the Governor of Carriden-Regis College looked with such carelessness and indifference, mingled with a touch of nervous embarrassment, when Mrs. Waldemar's

lady friend said at the Millsmany Station,

“Meta, my dear, this is the gentleman who has kindly undertaken to see you safely home.”

There has come over it now, in place of that early shyness, an expression of womanly composure and calm. This Meta is to the Meta of ten years ago what the full-blossomed and leafy June is to the coy half-fledged beauty of April, with its sweet tremor of sunshine and shower, its smile of warm summer promise dimmed and yet brightened by the tears of departing spring.

Stephen Garton preaches in the College chapel sometimes. If you want to see Meta at her best, you should go then. For with the reverence of her upward look to him there mingles, as she listens to her hus-

band, such an expression of wifely pride and content as puts its crowning touch upon the fair woman-sweetness of her face. And sometimes at the close of one of his fine trains of thought, there passes between them that quick lightning glance of sympathy which shows that their communion is not only of heart with heart, but of mind with mind. Meta is very happy. And to give a brighter glow to her happiness, she evidently possesses the consciousness of that which every wife longs for so earnestly, and prizes so truly, the respect of others for her husband.

If, in some moment of wandering thought, her eyes turn away from the preacher, they fall upon a white marble tablet, inserted in the wall close to the pulpit, and bearing this inscription—

ERECTED
BY THE STUDENTS OF THIS COLLEGE,
TO THE MEMORY OF
THEIR BELOVED FRIEND AND GOVERNOR,
FERGUS ELLESLEY, D.D., LL.D.,
WHO DIED APRIL —TH, 18—,
AGED 62.

Meta little thinks as she reads those words over and over again with the unconsciousness of long habit, that they tell of one who loved her even unto death, and in whose heart the love of her blossomed out through sadness and disappointment, into such a noble life.

Fergus Ellesley died on the eve of Easter-day, as the bells of St. Wilfred's Church were chiming for evening service. And they buried him by his wife's side in Allaston churchyard, none knowing that any other love

save the love of her, had ever stirred his heart, or that any deeper sorrow than the sorrow of her loss had put its shadow over his life.

THE END.



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